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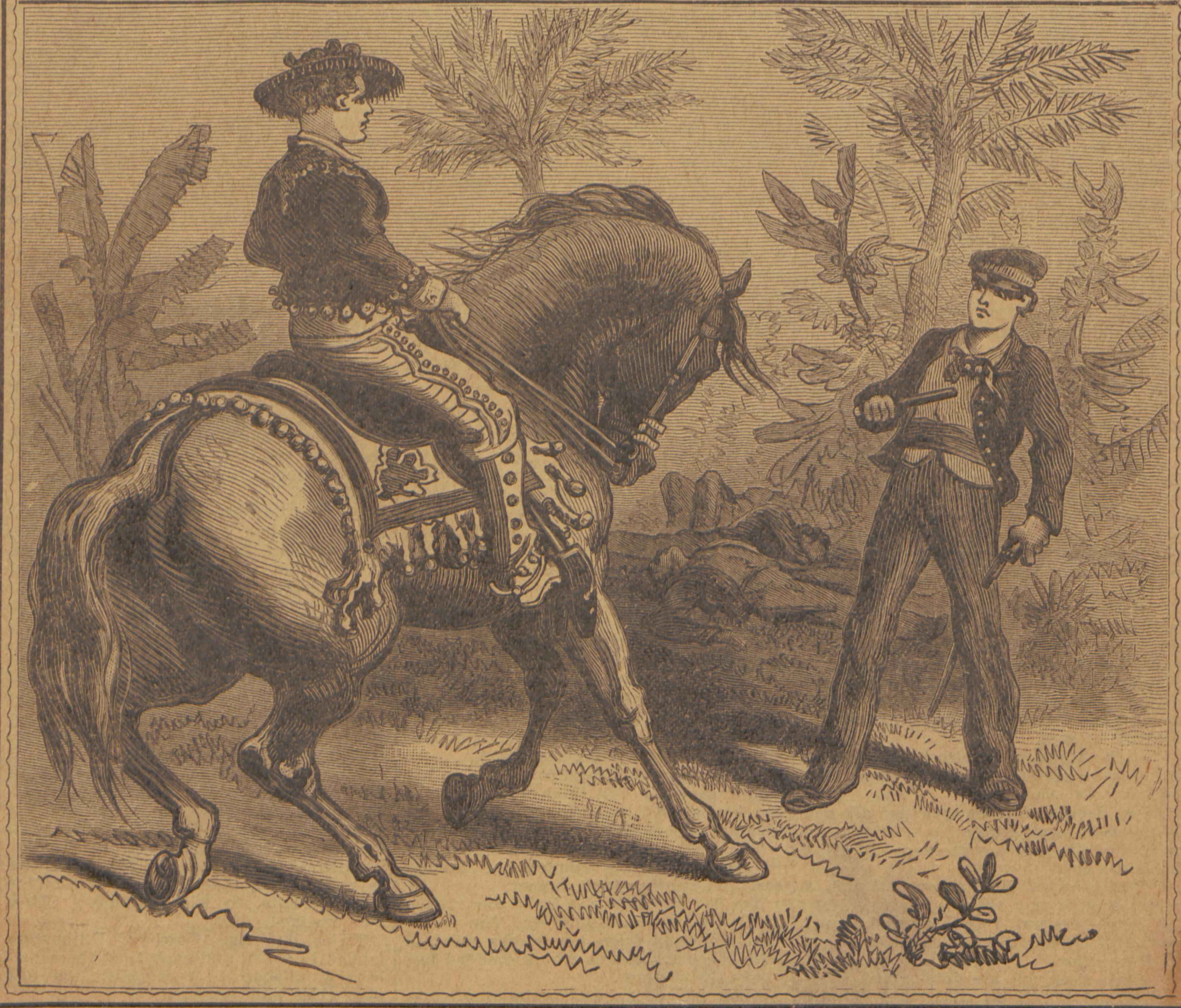
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THE TEXAN HUSTLERS IN CUBA

By Col. Prentiss Ingraham.



HOTSPUR HARRY, HIS BROKEN SWORD IN ONE HAND, HIS REVOLVER IN THE OTHER, TURNED TO FACE HIS NEW FOE.

The Texan Hustlers in Cuba;
OR,
**THE COWBOY ROUGH RIDERS
ON THE RAMPAGE.**

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF 'BUFFALO BILL'S BLUFF,' 'BUF-
FALO BILL'S LEAGUE,' ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
A FAIR PILOT.

"My child, it would be madness for you to venture out to sea in a night like this. Why, listen to the wild roar of the surf, and the winds howl terribly."

"Father, this very storm has driven all Spanish cruisers to the shelter of the harbors, and none will be abroad to sight the Mustang when she comes in."

"Yes, but she will hardly attempt a landing in such a blow."

"Oh, yes; bold men who live with death dogging them, care not for the elements, for they are less merciless than are Spaniards to Cuban patriots and those who aid them, father, as you well know, for, born a gentleman and to riches, you are now hiding in a coast hamlet, a mere fisherman, to save your family and yourself from foes who would show no mercy to a hero of the Ten Years' War."

"No, the Mustang, under the brave captain Brother Andrea has told us of, and his gallant cowboys, will not falter; they will surely run in to land and rescue the lovely Senorita Agramonte, her brave young brother, Hotspur Harry, and the others whom cruel Colonel Blanco Bartello hold prisoners up in the Wild Flower Plantation Villa."

"I see that you are determined to go, Marcelite."

"I am, father."

"The risk is terrible."

"The little Flying Fish has weathered worse storms, father, with you at her helm."

"But, I am getting old now, and my wounds are troubling me more."

"Father, you are not speaking for yourself, but for me. You know we can beat out under close-reefed sails, meet the steamer, and with care I can get on board, and you can scud back to harbor here before the gale."

"But, you dread my being able to board the steamer—that is it."

"I confess it."

"Never fear, for I will make it. Now we must be off, for it is good dark, and the Mustang will be pushing her sharp nose near the coast soon."

"But—"

"Father, say no more, for I am determined. Colonel Agramonte and his men are down from the patriot mountain camps, to make a sham attack upon the whole line of the Spaniards about the villa, which will draw all from the coast to beat off a supposed grand assault by General Gomez."

"If the Mustang fails to come in, then the rescue of our friends at the villa cannot take place."

"No, Brother Andrea arranged all, and I promised to go out to the steamer and pilot her in, while you were to bring back the boat."

"But, Andrea did not expect such a storm as this, my child."

"It matters not; I shall go and do my part, if I have to let the Flying Fish go to destruction."

"I see that you are determined, Marcelite, and I will go with you. I only

spoke for your sake, for I do not care as to myself, as I am getting old and would freely give my life for Cuba Libre."

"No, you are needed here, father, with mother, to care for our humble home."

"Andrea is in the patriot service, and I begin to-night to serve them, while poor Julio, they tell me, has been sacrificed by the Spaniards, though that I will not believe, for I have an abiding faith in his yet coming back to me."

"Heaven grant it, Marcelite!"

"If he is dead, then he is but another victim in the struggle for freedom. But, come, father; I am ready!"

The two wended their way from the shelter of a bold bluff, down toward the beach of a small basin in which the fury of the storm was not much felt.

Around the shores of the basin, for the distance of a mile, were scattered the humble homes of fishermen, with their gardens in the rear.

In the basin were anchored a dozen or more of little, stanch fishing craft of West Indian model and rig.

Down to a small pier went the two. In the darkness they appeared to be father and son, but, as the name has denoted, one was a girl, though attired as a lad.

The two were a Cuban and his daughter, and back under the shadow of the bluff was their home.

Andrea Taos, the old Cuban's son, was the best and boldest pilot of the coast. He had run in a number of filibusters with arms and ammunition for the patriots; but on this night, when a steamer was to come in with a band of Texas Cowboy Rescuers, duty demanded Andrea's presence to meet Colonel Agramonte and his soldiers from the mountains, so the pilot's sister, Marcelite, had been given the perilous task of meeting the filibuster Mustang, and running her in to a landing—a task from which she would not shrink.

Entering a little lifeboat, the fair young pilot and her father rowed out to the Flying Fish. Soon her sails were set, anchor raised, and she went flying out of the narrow inlet, to face the storm on the gulf, while standing on the beach, gazing out into the darkness, was the wife of old Andrea, the mother of Marcelite, murmuring prayers for the safety of those so dear to her.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT UNFOLDED.

It is one of the most striking instances of man's power, to behold a vessel in a storm, battling with Nature in a rage. It is a proof of both pluck and skill, to behold a steamer, guided on her way by the will of one man, who controls her destiny.

On such a night was the filibuster steamer, Mustang, forcing her way through mighty seas, swept by torrents of spray, careening under the force of savage winds, yet pushing steadily onward in her course to reach the dark coast of Cuba, that could not have been seen in the gloom of night, save for a light here and there visible along the shores.

The storm's howling drowned all other sound, save the dull thud of the engines as they almost resistlessly drove the steamer on her way.

The craft looked like a black phantom in the darkness, skimming the tossing seas and hunting for her prey.

Not the glimmer of a light was visible on board, from stem to stern. The smoke that streamed from her stacks mingled with the black clouds which scudded low above the steamer.

Upon her decks was ominous silence.

Those there were in a few hours to meet they knew not what—were, perhaps, to fall in fierce battle on the dark island they were approaching.

The deck would have presented a strange sight, indeed, in the broad glare of daylight.

At night, when the darkness could almost be felt, a mass of men and horses could barely be made out. The animals, saddled and bridled, were packed closely in rows from bulwark to bulwark. At the head of each horse stood his rider, grasping his rein to steady and calm him.

Over the saddle and horse was thrown a canvas awning, to protect them from the torrents of salt spray dashing upon them. A narrow lane of several feet ran from bulwark to bulwark; then came another row of horses, another row of riders, who were also muffled up in canvas covering, or rubber blankets.

Thus, amidships were gathered over two hundred horses and nearly as many men.

The commander of the steamer was glad of the storm. It made the landing upon the coast more certain.

Spanish cruisers would be hunting shelter on such a night, and if none had taken refuge inshore, where the Mustang was to find a landing, then the gallant little steamer would have done her part.

From the coast of Texas she had come, clearing as a cattle craft, a tramp steamer engaged in the gulf trade.

Where she landed her cargo was her own business, unless one of Uncle Sam's cruisers made it hers, or a Spaniard afloat kept his eyes more watchful than usual.

Upon the bridge of the steamer were two men. One was Captain Rudolph Sommers, who commanded the craft, and an old filibuster of the Ten Years' War—a small, wiry, determined person, who had been an officer in the United States Navy.

The other was a tall, cloaked form, of martial bearing, and clad in picturesque cowboy garb.

This his cloak of course concealed.

But his head was surmounted by a broad sombrero.

This person was Captain Charles Chase—"Captain Charlie," as his men loved to call him, for he commanded the Cowboy Clan then on the way to land in Cuba.

Captain Chase had been educated in the navy, but had resigned on account of a fatal duel, and had served lately in Mexico.

Drifting into Texas, he had purchased a ranch, and had become an officer of the Cowboy Clan, formed for protection from Indians and Mexican raiders, and of which league of splendid Rough Riders Rafael Agramonte, a young Cuban exile, had been made the captain.

Marrying Stella Aguilar, Cuban heiress and beauty, Rafael Agramonte had gone there to live on his wife's plantation home; his sister, Lucita, had accompanied him, his young brother, Harry, the Boy Bugler of the clan, remaining on the Texas ranch.

With the breaking out of the Cuban war, Rafael Agramonte had been arrested by the Spaniards, as a hero of the Ten Years' War, and Charlie Chase, who had become the captain of the Cowboy Clan in Texas, had called for volunteers to rescue him, their old leader, and his sister, Lucita, to whom Captain Chase was engaged.

Twice had the Cowboy Filibusters landed in Cuba, and each time there had been a mishap to accomplish the full plan they had intended.

Rafael Agramonte and his beautiful wife had joined Gomez, the former being made a colonel, and he had with him nearly two-score Texan cowboys, while Stella, his wife, was the leader of a Guard of Amazons.

But in the villa on Wild Flower Plantation Lucita Agramonte was a prisoner to the Spanish colonel, Blanco Bartello, and her brother, Hotspur Harry, was with her, under sentence of death, though he was a Texan born.

The overseer of the plantation, Mendoza, and his wife and child, were also prisoners, the former also under death sentence.

The major of the Spanish regiment, one Don Ruiz Valdos, a Spaniard who had been a Texan Ranchero, a member of the Cowboy Clan, had been a lover of Lucita Agramonte when she lived in the United States, but had proved a traitor to his comrades, fled to Cuba, and was found to have been a spy of Spain, being really a secret service officer.

Such was the situation at the opening of this story.

CHAPTER III.

A DARING LEAP.

Having made my readers somewhat acquainted with the principal characters of my story, a romance, by the way, founded upon the sternest realities of truth, for I am not dealing with fiction wholly, but with people and scenes that exist to-day, I will continue on board the filibuster steamer Mustang, in her night run into Cuba.

If she was breaking the neutrality laws of the Government whose flag she was flying, she was going on a mission to prove that "blood is thicker than water," that humanity was striving to save loved ones from Spanish hatred and merciless revenge.

Captain Charlie Chase, standing by the side of the steamer's commander, had a glass to his eyes, and was searching the black waters ahead most thoroughly.

"We're running in too fast, Captain Sommers—slow down to one-half speed," he said, and the twang of the gong in the engine room was at once responded to by the steamer's slackened speed.

"I take it that we are little more than a league off the shore, sir," said Captain Sommers.

"All of that, sir.

Taos, the Pilot, should be fully out this far, though I can see no trace of a boat."

"It will be hard to find in this rough sea and darkness."

"Yes, but he can see us, where we could not find him, and will run to us.

"Bring her down to quarter speed, Captain Sommers."

The order was again obeyed, and the steamer had just headway on, while every eye was searching the black waters for some sign of a sail.

"You know your man, sir, and that he will come?" said Captain Sommers, who had not before commanded the steamer in her former filibustering expeditions to the island.

"Death alone will prevent him, or being captured," was the reply.

"In case he should fail you, sir?"

"I will take the risk and carry the steamer in to the mouth of the lagoon, for I have twice been in before, you know, and then, too, I visited Agramonte at his home here, and learned something of these waters then."

"You know best, sir, what you can do."

"Stop her headway, Captain Sommers,

and keep her steady, for we are getting in too close."

The gong in the engine room again rang out the order, and the Mustang was moving only by the force of the storm.

"Steamer ahoy!"

Clear as a flute came the call over the waters, and it made every heart bound as it was heard.

"Ahoy! ahoy!"

The response of Captain Summers was through his trumpet, and all awaited the result.

"What steamer is that?" came in the same clear tones, and it seemed that the voice was nearer than before.

"The Mustang."

"Ay, ay, sir.

"Lay to and I'll board you!"

"Headway stopped, save by the storm; but I'll back engines and steady her," answered Captain Sommers.

"I will board astern, as I run by.

"Throw a strong line with life-buoy attached, for I'll have to leap into the sea."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The orders were quickly given, and Captain Chase ran aft himself to attend to the difficult task of taking the daring pilot on board.

The little Flying Fish now came into sight for the first time.

She was driving before the storm under sails reefed down almost to nothing, yet fairly flew, and lay so low in the waters that but for her canvas she would not have been seen.

She was nearing the steamer, as she ran along, having evidently come from astern, and sighted the Mustang some time before.

"That is not Taos, but sounds like a woman's voice," said Captain Chase to his Cowboy Lieutenant, Jack Harding, who answered:

"It does, indeed, sir.

"Can the Spaniards have captured Taos and sent some pilot out to meet us?"

"We will soon know, and if that is his errand, woe be unto him, for I'll run him up at the end of a rope very quickly."

The Flying Fish was now running parallel with the steamer, which had begun to forge ahead again, and suddenly the sharp bows of the little craft wore around, and, catching the gale upon her port quarter, sails were bowled flat, and she came bounding along directly toward the Mustang.

Captain Chase stood at the taffrail, the life-buoy in hand, ready to throw, while a mate of the Mustang held another, and a third was ready, for there must be no mistake.

On came the plunging, bounding little craft, men stood ready to haul in on the life line when ready, and another moment would tell the story of success or failure.

Nearer and nearer came the Flying Fish, until it seemed that her bowsprit must spear the steamer, when suddenly she swept around into the teeth of the gale, directly under the stern of the Mustang, and now the clear voice was heard again:

"Throw your lines!"

Both life-buoys were thrown almost together, and that of Captain Chase dropped on the deck of the Flying Fish.

Instantly it was seized by the daring pilot, and as the Flying Fish swept on the leap was made from her deck into the raging sea, while Captain Chase called out:

"Well done!

"Now haul in, lads!"

CHAPTER IV.

MARCELITE AT THE HELM.

The men holding the life line drew in hard upon it, and, carrying it to the side of the steamer, to avoid the screws, in another moment the pilot was dragged on board in safety.

"You are not Pilot Taos," said Captain Chase, grasping the hand of the young girl, as she reached the deck.

"No," was the quick response, and, springing to the side, clear came the hail in Spanish:

"Ho, the Flying Fish!"

"Ahoy!"

The response came in the deep voice of a man.

"I am all right, now, father, so run right home."

"Ay, ay," was the response, and the girl stood watching the Flying Fish until she saw her put away before the storm and go dashing landward.

"The Flying Fish is all right now, sir; but my father is an old man, and is alone on board," said Marcelite Taos to Captain Chase.

"If he trained you, then there is no fear for him, for you had the helm of that boat until you put about under the stern of the steamer."

"Oh, yes, father's all right now, sir."

"Now tell me where is Taos the Pilot?"

"He is with Colonel Agramonte, sir, arranging for a feint attack to draw the Spaniards away, so you can land."

"Ah! a good idea, indeed."

"But you are his representative?"

"Yes, sir."

"I will run the steamer into a sheltered cove under a point of land, for you cannot land at the lagoon, as the Spaniards have guns at the top of the hill leading from it, and can sweep the road."

"You know best, doubtless, and though a mere boy, I have already seen enough of your pluck to have confidence in you."

"I have a letter for you, sir, if you are Captain Chase, from my brother; but it would not do to show a light aboard now."

"No, indeed."

"I can read it at the landing."

"Now come to the bridge with me, and take charge of the steamer, but put this storm coat on, and here is a flask for you to take a swallow of liquor, my brave lad."

A light laugh answered the words of Captain Chase, and in the same accent in which she spoke English, Marcelite said:

"I'll put on the storm coat, sir, but I do not care for the liquor, for I am not a boy, but a girl."

"A girl?" repeated the astonished American.

"Yes, sir."

"My name is Marcelite Taos, and I am the sister of your pilot."

"Well, this is surprising, indeed; but then it should not be after all I have heard of what you Cuban women can do and have done."

"But, then, it is no easy task for a woman to do what you have undertaken, Senorita Taos."

"I know the channel, sir, having run the Flying Fish through in the darkest nights, and in storms as bad as this."

"I know the depth of water all the way, and Brother Andrea told me the draught of your steamer, and he trusted me to meet you and run her in."

"And I trust you, too, Senorita Taos," and Captain Chase led the way up to the bridge, and introduced the fair pilot to Captain Sommers, adding:

"Our pilot is a young girl, captain, but Taos trusted her, and we will do the same."

"She is our pilot's sister."

Captain Sommers answered, as he grasped her hand:

"I expected to meet a boy, but not a girl; but you have already shown your mettle, miss, and if Captain Chase is satisfied, I certainly am."

Captain Chase felt assured that Andrea Taos knew what he was about in sending his sister to run the steamer in, and he said:

"I have perfect confidence in your skill and nerve, Senorita Taos."

"Take the steamer!"

"Will you, sir, attend to the bells, while I pick out the channel?"

"Certainly."

Brother Andrea explained to me about the bells, and how to aid the steamer with her screws, for she is a double propeller he told me, and in rounding a sharp turn in the channel, I could go ahead on one wheel and back on the other."

"Yes, and you seem to know just what to do."

The girl was glancing out over the waters now, while the steamer had been moving with just headway upon her.

"Father is all right now, for he has headed into the basin," she said.

"I do not see him."

"I did, sir, for I knew just where to look."

"Ah! and where will you land, my fair pilot, for we are getting pretty well in."

"Yes, sir, you happened to be going right when we sighted you."

"Do you see yonder point?"

The glance of Charlie Chase revealed the designated point.

"Well, we will go in under the lee of that, sir."

"What speed has the steamer now?"

"No more than headway."

"Then let her go ahead at half speed and hold her at that."

The bells signaled the engine room, the screws began to churn faster, and the steamer started in for a landing under the charge of the Cuban Girl Pilot.

CHAPTER V.

THE RUN IN AND THE LANDING.

The black outline ahead, dotted here and there only with the glimmer of a light, loomed up nearer and nearer.

To those on the steamer it seemed black and threatening, indeed, save to the fair pilot.

She knew the outline of the land, faint as it was.

Many a time had she been on the deck of the Flying Fish, by day and by night, in storm and in calm, and studied the island profile, picking out scenes she knew.

The channel into the lee of the point was a narrow one, with shoals on either side, and several turns in it.

But there was ample water all the way in, and if the turns were made right there was not much danger.

The channel was entered squarely, and the first turn was near at hand, and the Girl Pilot was looking for her landmark, when suddenly a light loomed up off the starboard bow, and it swayed to and fro and disappeared.

"That is my father."

"He has hove to just where I am to turn, but I had my bearings," said the girl.

A moment after she said:

"Now we turn—go ahead hard upon your starboard screw and back on your port!"

The bells signaled the order, the wheel flew around, and the steamer began to mind her helm rapidly.

All were anxious, they could not help it, but there was no touch, and the steamer began to run with her port beam to the gale.

The Flying Fish had disappeared now, but soon after a light was seen again dead ahead.

"It is my father!"

"He has run to the next turn."

"See! he is shielding the light so it cannot be seen ashore."

Only a minute was the light visible, and then it disappeared.

A moment after the Flying Fish was seen dashing along to windward on her way back, and close to the steamer.

"You are all right now, my child!" came from the little craft.

"Ay, ay, father."

"I thank you!"

The Flying Fish was gone, and the Girl Pilot was working the steamer around on the next turn.

In his anxiety for his daughter, old Andrea Taos had run to the turns to mark them, by showing a momentary light, but Marcelite had her bearings and would have made them without a miss.

Had Andrea Taos, however, known what a severe storm would have come on, he would not have had his sister make the attempt to run the steamer in, though he knew her skill and nerve, as far as bringing in the Flying Fish was concerned, in any weather and darkness.

On went the steamer now, at quarter speed, and as she approached the black point of land, it seemed that she was going dangerously near, and Captain Chase said:

"There must be good water close in here."

"Fifty feet to the very point, sir."

"When we round it we are in a cove, but the steamer cannot get nearer than a couple of hundred feet from the shore, and Brother Andrea said you would have to put your horses over and let them swim."

"That can be done, for they swim like dogs," was the answer.

Soon after the Mustang swept around the point, and Marcelite herself pulled the bell to stop her.

Headway was checked, and soon the anchor was let fall, in comparatively still water.

At once boats were lowered, and the horses were swung over the side into the water, several of them with riders on them, who led the way ashore.

Within little more than an hour the horses were all ashore, only two having drowned in the landing, and saddled up as fast as they came out of the water, the cowboys were soon in readiness for the march.

A number of the men had come prepared to remain and join the patriots, and these, under Jack Harding, divided into a separate troop.

Marcelite was given a pony, which she mounted like one born in the saddle, and rode to the front with Captain Chase.

Supplies, medicines, and ammunition had been brought, and landed in the boats, and all was put upon pack animals, to be carried to the patriot camps.

"Now, sir, I will guide you to the villa grounds, and as Andrea was to watch for the steamer from the cliffs, he has ere this reported the landing, and Colonel Agramonte will doubtless begin his attack soon," said Marcelite.

Going ahead in the dark woodland, with Captain Chase by her side, Marcelite led the way, the cowboys following.

They had gone but a short distance when suddenly the deep boom of a gun was heard inland, and the girl cried:

"Colonel Agramonte has begun the attack."

"Now, we will give the Spaniards time to go to the lines to meet him, and then you can make a dash for the villa, the force you intend to send to join the patriots awaiting your return where I will halt, for when you come back they can go, though they should be near to support you did you need them."

"You certainly well understand the situation, senorita, and I am fortunate in having your services," replied Captain Chase.

The roar of guns and the rattle of rifles was now heard along the inland line of the Spaniards, and the girl led on at a gallop until they came to the grounds about the villa.

"Now I know my way," cried Captain Chase, and drawing his machete, he led his cowboys on in a charge upon the villa and to rescue Lucita Agramonte, Hotspur Harry, and the other prisoners that Colonel Blanco Bartello held in his power.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COWBOYS' RESCUE.

The gallant cowboys made the rescue of the prisoners by their bold dash upon the villa, where the Spanish soldiers on guard were quickly shot and cut down.

Mounting the prisoners upon horses brought for them, Captain Chase placed himself by the side of Lucita Agramonte and said:

"Now I have you again in my keeping, fair senorita, I will not allow you to escape."

"Come, we will return to the steamer, for, though both your brother and Mendoza are in irons, they are mounted, and Senora Mendoza is also with us, with her child, as well as your maid, Flora."

"Come!"

"Not to the steamer, Charles, for my brother and his wife have cast their lot with the patriots, Harry has determined to do the same, and I will not leave them, so you return with your brave men, and we will stay here, going to the mountain camps with Rafael."

The words fell with a shock upon Charles Chase.

After his rescue of Lucita and the others, they were to remain in Cuba.

"Has our expedition been of no use then, Lucita?" he said, in a tone of reproach.

"Far from it, indeed, for Harry and Mendoza were under sentence of death, while to save their lives I had pledged my word to become the wife of Colonel Blanco Bartello, while, could I have escaped him, the same promise would have had to hold good with Don Ruiz Valdos, the traitor of the Cowboy Clan, and who is the major of Colonel Bartello's regiment."

"Great God!"

"We did, then, accomplish much by coming."

"But have you made up your mind to remain, Lucita, or to return with me to become my wife, and have Harry and the Mendozas go with us?"

"I will remain here, Charles."

"Remember, I am half a Cuban, for my father was a Cuban patriot, though my mother was a Texan, and Harry is the same, and after his treatment by Bartello, swears he will remain here with our half brother, Rafael, and fight for the Cuban cause, and Mendoza will do the same."

"Take us to where we can join Rafael, and then make your way back to your steamer, you and your brave cowboys."

"And Rafael, when this war is at an end, come and claim me if you will."

For a moment Captain Chase made no reply.

Then he said:

"I do not blame you, Lucita."

"But the cause you love is also mine, and, though I return with my men tonight, mark my words that as soon as I can do so, I will be back on this island with a gallant band of Texans and Mexicans, recruited along the Rio Grande, to follow my lead, and for your sake I will strike a blow for Cuba Libre."

"Come, we must be away now."

It made the heart of Lucita Agramonte rejoice to hear her lover's words, and pledge to aid Cuba, and she rode rapidly along in the lead, with Hotspur Harry and Mendoza in irons, and Senora Mendoza, her child, and Flora, the maid, following, while Captain Chase had dashed to the rear to fight back pursuing Spaniards.

"I will not go, but remain to fight with the patriots, and get revenge for the treatment we have all received at Spanish hands," cried Hotspur, the handsome Boy Bugler of the Texan cowboys.

"I have so told Captain Chase, Harry, and we will join Brother Rafael, instead of going to the steamer, for we can flank around the Spanish lines, as you well know," answered Lucita.

"Yes, indeed, I know the way."

"And there are some cowboys to remain in Cuba, and they are waiting for us in the woodland, along with some pack animals loaded with supplies, Captain Chase told me."

"We will be all right, sister."

"Yes, indeed, Harry, and Captain Chase says that he will return with a force of Texans to fight for Cuba."

Hotspur Harry gave a yell of delight, and shook his manacled hands until his chains clanked loudly.

In a short while Captain Chase dashed up again, and soon after they reached the woodland, where Jack Harding and his Cowboy Volunteers, who were to remain in Cuba, were awaiting with the pack animals.

But the Spaniards were returning to the villa, and were pressing the cowboys hard with overwhelming numbers, and the band of Jack Harding had to form a line to join their comrades in the beating back of their foes.

Andrea Taos just then joined the cowboys, and he reported that the Spaniards had discovered that Colonel Agramonte's force was a small one, intended only to make a feint attack while the filibusters landed and rescued the prisoners, and that they were marching to cut off the clan from joining the Cuban soldiers under Rafael.

"We will have to all return to the steamer, Captain Chase, and make a landing elsewhere at another time," said Taos.

As he knew the pilot was better competent to judge, Captain Chase ordered the retreat to be made, while he made a machete charge upon the Spaniards pressing forward, and one they would not soon forget.

Taos he told to lead the way to the steamer, carrying the rescued party, the wounded, and dead cowboys with them.

But Lucita said she would not leave Cuba, and Hotspur Harry upheld her in it, saying that he could find a hiding place until they could join the patriots.

"Come with me. I can shelter you."

It was Marcelite Taos, the Girl Pilot, who spoke, and her brother said quickly:

"Yes, go with my sister, for she will hide you until you can reach the patriot camps."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETREAT OF THE COWBOYS.

It was no time to hesitate, for the Spaniards were pressing forward to try and overwhelm the cowboys before they could reach their steamer, and which they supposed was in the lagoon, where the former landings had been made.

This was a great aid to the cowboys, for the Spaniards were massing toward the hill that led down to the lagoon, the path also by which they had come from the Mustang entering the woodland near the same spot.

"Go with the pilot's sister—I will know where to find you upon my return, and it will not be long," Captain Chase had ridden back to say, and away he dashed again to lead another machete charge upon the Spaniards.

Thus urged, Hotspur Harry, in irons as he was, and Mendoza, also manacled, felt that it was best to go with Marcelite Taos, and with Lucita and Mrs. Mendoza, carrying her child, they pushed on through the woods by a path well known to the Girl Pilot.

They could not go at a rapid pace, owing to the manacled limbs of Hotspur Harry and Mendoza, and the little child, but it was certain that the Spaniards would not follow them on that path, and the Girl Pilot showed no dread of results.

"We have a little home, as you know to be true, senorita, but it is large enough to entertain you and your friends, and my parents are true Cubans, so you'll be welcome," said Marcelite, as they went along.

"I know that well, Marcelite, as I also know that your father was the brave ally of my father and brother in the Ten Years' War, and lost all he had of riches, while he is even now hiding under the disguise of a fisherman.

"We know we will be welcome, but we will have to be most careful that none of the people know we are there, for you need not be told that there are liable to be spies among them."

"That I know well, senorita; but we do not know whom to doubt."

"There is a secure hiding place in the cliff, and the Senor Harry and Mendoza can go there, and we will all get along nicely until you can reach the patriot camp, for Captain Chase is coming back again soon, I heard him say, and with a large force of his brave Texans to fight for Cuba."

"Yes, he is to become a patriot, he told me, and I rejoice that it is so, for I know well how valuable he will be."

"But how was it that my brother Rafael was not able to get around and join the cowboys, I wonder?"

"Brother Andrea explained it in a word, senorita, for he said that he knew by the way the Spaniards threw troops to this end of the line that there was a traitor in the ranks of the Cubans who told of their small force, and that the cowboys intended to join them."

"That explains it, surely."

"But, hark, how fiercely they are fighting."

"Yes, a handful against many; but then I have no fear for Captain Chase and his cowboys, after all that Brother Andrea has told me of them."

"But here we are at the path that leads down from the bluff to our cottage, and as it is very steep, you will all have to be careful."

"Once you are safe, I will return to

the cliff outlook and see the Mustang put out to sea."

"And I will accompany you, Marcelite."

A quarter of an hour after the little party reached the Taos cottage, and found the fisherman and his wife up and anxious about their daughter and son, on account of the hard fighting they could distinctly hear.

The people of the hamlet had all been aroused, and groups of excited men and women stood here and there upon the beach, listening to the firing.

Lucita was at once made welcome, as were also the others, and the old fisherman set to work to free Hotspur Harry and Mendoza of their manacles by filing them off.

Slipping out quietly, Marcelite and Lucita started for the cliff lookout, and leading the way up the steep path, the Girl Pilot was not long in reaching a spot from whence they could look down upon the cove, a mile distant, where the Mustang lay at anchor.

The cowboys had reached the landing, and there turned upon their foes and beat them back, while a force was busy getting the cargo, the wounded and dead back on board the Mustang.

This was done rapidly, but without confusion; the ponies were unsaddled and allowed to go free, for they could not be taken on board, and Taos drove them up the shore of the cove to a pasture he knew of, while he said, upon his return:

"The Spaniards will not learn until daylight where they are, Captain Chase, and after running the steamer out through the channel, I will return and make a dash with them for the mountain camps, so the enemy will not get them."

"It is a bold plan, and like you, Taos; but I will want your services before very long to land another expedition upon the coast."

"I will be on the watch for you, Senor Captain, to run you in, for I will remain on the coast now; but should I meet with death, or harm, my sister, Marcelite, will be your pilot and you know that she is to be trusted."

"She is, indeed; but now we are ready to go to sea."

The Spaniards had not dared follow the cowboys through the woodland to their steamer, and contented themselves with firing at random with cannon and rifles, as though to frighten the Americans off the island as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PILOT'S STRATEGY.

The storm still continued, though it had lost some of its power, as the Mustang stood out to sea, now with Taos the Pilot on the bridge.

If the cowboys who had been going to join the patriots were disappointed at their failing to do so, they could not but feel that they had conquered much in saving the Boy Bugler, Hotspur Harry, and Mendoza from death, or their lives from being spared by such a sacrifice as Lucita Agramonte was willing to make to spare them, in becoming the wife of Colonel Blanco Bartello.

Then, too, they were cheered with the determination of their gallant captain, not only to return with them to Cuba, but to bring a still larger force of Mexicans and Texans and to unite their fortunes with the Cuban patriots in their fight for independence.

The lifeboat had not been hauled up to the davits in the run out, but was towed astern of the Mustang, until the

steamer had passed out of the channel into open water.

Then the engines were slowed down, the lifeboat was hauled alongside, and Taos the Pilot stood ready to get into it.

"Remember, captain, if I do not meet you outside, my sister will; but should she not do so, send a boat ashore in the inlet, land before you reach the first house, which is where I live, and there you will find my father, and he can land the expedition, should Marcelite or I fail you."

"I understand, Taos; but I will name a date, one month hence, for you to look for me, and each night after that until I come."

"If the Senorita Agramonte and the others can reach the patriot camp meanwhile, it will be well for them to do so; but if not, have them ready to go with us, and I wish to land as secretly as possible, as it is my intention to bring back a large cargo of supplies and ammunition, with as many men as I can, if I have to charter another steamer."

"I know of a number of Mexicans I can recruit, splendid fellows, who were once lancers in the Army of Mexico, but are now cattlemen, and my own clan are adepts in the use of the lance and the lasso, as well as firearms, and we can show these Spaniards a style of fighting that will surprise them."

"I am sure of that, senor."

"I suppose our signals remain the same."

"Yes, save that there may be another steamer with the Mustang."

"I hope there may, senor," and with a farewell grasp of the hand the pilot swung over the side into the lifeboat, seized the oars, and went flying away toward the shore, while the Mustang pushed on out into the gulf, bound on another mission of danger.

Andrea Taos was a perfect sailor, and he handled the lifeboat splendidly in the high seas that were running.

Before the gale as he was driving, he had little to do save steady the boat, as the winds drove it on.

At length he ran into the little cove under the point of land, drew the boat upon the shore, but did not make it fast.

He could not hide it, he knew, from the Spaniards when daylight came, and he left the impression that in the hurry of flight the steamer's crew had forgotten it.

Going along up the shore, he came to the pasture at the head of the inlet where the horses had been driven.

There he found them, one animal saddled, bridled, and staked out, just as he had left him, the others feeding near.

Mounting at a spring, for he was a fine horseman, he started the herd on up the valley, where he knew a narrow, but steep and rugged, path led to the highway a mile distant, running along the ridge.

To cross this was the danger, for the Spaniards might be patrolling the highway with their cavalry by that time.

He knew that he would have to go along this road for half a mile, then turn off at a trail to the right, and leading to the mountains.

Right here the Spaniards might have a gun and number of soldiers, he thought.

And more, right there Colonel Agramonte, in his retreat, might make a stand to beat back the Spaniards, for he had the support of the mountains and his own camp behind him a few leagues distant.

Up the steep and narrow path the pilot drove the herd of Texas ponies, hardy, fleet little animals, that had been trained to being driven in their own country.

The highway was reached, and, dashing to the front, Taos turned the herd in the right direction.

Then he set them going at a gallop.

He had not gone far before he heard wild yells in Spanish ahead, orders in stentorian tones, and then a number of shots.

But he was too near upon the scene of confusion to ride to the front and turn back his herd of ponies.

The voices were in Spanish, and from what he caught the pilot discovered that it was a band of Spanish cavalry, and that they had a field-piece along.

They were going along the highway just as he had feared they would be.

But his coming, with his two hundred ponies in a gallop, was supposed by the Spaniards to be the American cowboys, who had flanked around from the coast and were riding hard to reach the turn-off to the mountains.

That they were not over a couple of hundred of them Taos knew when he heard the order to fire the cannon down the highway and then retreat with full speed to the outpost near the villa gate.

Another moment and the darkness of the timber was illumined by a bright flash, a deep roar followed, and a shell came tearing along and into the dense mass of ponies, killing and wounding half a dozen or more, while the shell burst almost over the pilot.

But he was unhurt, and shouted, in a voice of thunder:

"Charge them, Cubans, and show no mercy!"

CHAPTER IX.

CUBANS IN AMBUSH.

Rafael Agramonte, Colonel of Cavalry in the Cuban Army, was a born soldier.

He had been a Boy Hero in the Ten Years' War, and then his life in Texas for many years, and where he went with his father, had made a thorough American of him.

As a rancher and an officer of the Cowboy Clan, he had learned rough riding, hard fighting, and the command of men.

One of the Spaniards' first victims, when living on Wild Flower Plantation, his Cuban wife's estate, he had known what it was to suffer, and but for his rescue from a Spanish fort by Captain Chase and his cowboys, he would have been put to death.

Entering the army of General Gomez after his escape, with his beautiful wife, Stella, the captain of his Amazon Body Guard, he had already rendered good service, and he had readily entered into the plan of the cowboys to land and rescue their Boy Bugler, Hotspur Harry, and his sister and the Mendozas from the hands of Colonel Blanco Bartello.

It was not the desire of General Gomez to make an attack in earnest upon the Spanish force stationed on the Wild Flower Plantation.

He was not prepared to do so, and if he did it would cause a larger force to be sent there, and the coast just there was most suitable for landings of filibusters.

But to rescue Bartello's prisoners, General Gomez had been most willing for Colonel Rafael to take a couple of hundred men and two guns, to make a feint attack, so as to enable the cowboys to land and dash to the rescue.

This having all been arranged with Taos the pilot, Colonel Rafael Agramonte, with his amazon escort, his cowboy scouts, and a battalion of Cuban cavalry, had gone to the scene and made the feint attack, as has been seen.

But in the ranks of the Cubans there proved to be a traitor, and escaping to the Spaniards, he had informed Colonel Bartello of the whole plan, and the limited numbers that were making a pretended attack upon the plantation outposts.

This information caused Colonel Bartello to consolidate his men and try and cut off the Cubans' retreat, and the cowboys from their vessel.

Convinced by the movements of the Spaniards that some spy had betrayed his plans, Colonel Agramonte quickly withdrew his men from along the line, and endeavored to flank around and join the cowboys, to support them, and have those who intended to remain in Cuba accompany him on his retreat, and among them he hoped to find the escaped prisoners, his sister Lucita, Hotspur Harry, and the others.

But the Spaniards proved to be too heavy in guns and numbers to allow the flank movement, and convinced by the sound of the firing that the cowboys were retreating to the steamer, and could not be reached without taking desperate chances and losing many men, he made a rapid ride of it, by a path he knew well, to reach the mountain trail.

This he did, but instead of pushing on to the mountains, he determined to move back to the highway and there hold position, to see if the cowboys did make a dash through and be on hand to support them.

Owning the Wild Flower Plantation, as he had, for a couple of years, since his marriage, he had hunted over every foot of it and the surrounding country, and knew it well.

As he neared the spot where the trail turned into the highway, he heard voices and hoofs.

Spaniards in force were going along the highway, doubtless to guard it well to cut off all communication with the steamer.

He could not reach there in time to open on them, but he would take up position there and await others.

The turn-off was exactly suited for an ambush and defense.

The mountain trail turned off at a pass between two hills, and beyond it was a climb to the Cuban camps, so a few men retreating could keep back many in pursuit.

Colonel Agramonte quickly placed his guns on the ridge, commanding the highway, and had his men in ambush along the base, which was heavily wooded.

He knew that the Spaniards had just passed along.

Then, suddenly, he heard the sound of many running hoofs far along the highway.

The Spaniards heard them, too, and that the force coming were foes to Spain was proven by the excitement in the command that had just passed along.

Colonel Agramonte heard the orders given to retreat, the loud cries, the roar of the guns, and then the wild stampede that followed.

Quickly he passed the word along the line:

"They have met the cowboys!"

"Stand ready to ride down upon them, men, and let the cowboys know we are their friends!"

CHAPTER X.

THE RIDERLESS REGIMENT'S CAPTURE.

The Spaniards fired their cannon in the face of what they supposed to be the troop of cowboys, and then it became a stampede with them.

They had not gotten up their second gun for a shot, and when Pilot Taos shouted his loud command in Spanish, the Spanish artillery men, on guns and caissons, turned in wild flight, got their pieces all mixed, sprang from their horses, and it became a stampede.

On after them, a few hundred yards away, came the herd of Riderless Cavalry, with Taos now in the lead.

Suddenly the pilot heard wild cheers, that he knew well came from Cuban throats, and he was thus made aware that Colonel Agramonte had ambushed the Spaniards.

It would never do for him to dash upon the scene with his riderless ponies, and so he began to ride across the faces of the leaders, shouting and beating them back.

In this way he halted the herd just as they came upon the entangled guns and caissons in the highway.

So tangled were the horses that some had been thrown down, and a scene of wild confusion was the result.

Had the pilot's Riderless Regiment dashed in upon those horses thus in a snarl, the effect would have been terrible.

Fortunately the well-trained ponies had been halted, and now stood still in the highway.

Riding up to them, by voice and action the pilot tried to subdue the artillery and caisson horses, and in measure was successful, for animals trained by man are ever ready to obey him in danger and trouble.

Their riders had dismounted and fled, the gunners also, and the Riderless Regiment of Pilot Taos had thus captured the two guns, as many caissons, and an officer's ambulance and camp wagon.

In the meanwhile, down the highway a quarter of a mile the force of Spaniards in their stampede had rushed full upon Colonel Agramonte's ambush.

The two guns of the Cubans had just opened, then a volley of rifles, and the charge of the amazons and cavalry had followed.

A sweep around had flanked the Spaniards, and the fight was a hand-to-hand combat, short, fierce, and most deadly.

It was a fight in which no quarter was asked or received.

It was a battle that was decided with wonderful quickness, for the machetes and revolvers did desperate work.

"It is what we call in Texas a wipe-out," cried Colonel Agramonte, when a lull told that the battle had ended.

Then he gave orders to his men to catch all the Spaniards' horses, collect all their weapons and ammunition, so much needed by the Cubans, and be ready for a rapid retreat, for surely there would be larger forces hurled to the scene by Colonel Bartello.

This attended to, Colonel Agramonte turned up the highway, to know why the cowboys, as he supposed, had not come upon the scene.

A hail suddenly reached him:

"Ho, Colonel Agramonte!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Who calls?"

"Taos."

"I am here with a Riderless Regiment, for the cowboys had to leave their ponies."

"I have also some Spanish artillery and need aid, for I am alone."

Colonel Agramonte quickly dispatched one of his amazon escort back to the turn-off for aid, and dashed to meet Taos.

A few words of explanation followed, and the Cuban amazons gave a cheer at the valuable capture of the pilot from

the Spaniards, and the fact that he had brought his Riderless Regiment from the coast in safety.

The cowboy scouts soon dashed up, and it took this band of perfect horsemen only a few minutes to unravel the artillery horses, and those attached to the wagons and ambulance.

With Texan riders upon them now, and other cowboys surrounding the herd of ponies, the start was made quickly, down the highway for the turn-off to the mountains.

In the meantime, the other Cubans had collected their dead and wounded, and caught all the Spanish cavalry horses, stripped their dead foes of their weapons and ammunition, and were ready for the retreat, the advance having already started up the mountain trail.

"Plant all those guns on the ridge and train them down the highway, for Bartello's men are coming in large force," ordered Rafael Agramonte.

The order was obeyed, and when the Spaniards were within a quarter of a mile, the four guns, trained by the sound of the march, were fired.

Following the roar came the bursting of the shells, and that they had been well aimed the cries and confusion proved.

Giving the order for another all-round shot, the retreat was begun up the mountain trail, the guns being kept in the rear with the fighters, while the wounded, dead, captured cavalry horses, and Riderless Regiment were far in advance.

"They may send a force of cavalry after us, but I doubt it," said Rafael Agramonte to Taos, who rode by his side in the rear, when the command was in full retreat.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CUBANS' RETREAT.

"This has been a wonderful night's work, Pilot Taos," said Colonel Agramonte, as he rode with Andrea Taos in the retreat up the mountain trail.

The dawn was just breaking, the storm had passed over, the Cubans were well on their way to the camps of Gomez.

The Cuban commander had heard from Taos the story of the cowboys' landing and rescue, that his sister, Lucita, Hot-spur Harry, and the Mendozas were safe in the care of Marcelite, who had brought the Mustang in, and that Captain Chase was to return with all dispatch with a large force of men and a second vessel, with all needed supplies and munitions of war.

"If he gets in safely, it will enable General Gomez to send Maceo to Pinar del Rio Province, and to show the Spaniards that we dare fight them in the open, when we have ammunition and weapons," said Rafael.

"Yes, sir, for Captain Chase will bring a most valuable cargo."

"And he and his gallant cowboys will be an immense help, and can teach Cubans just how Spaniards ought to be met."

"Those Americans are the wildest fighters I ever saw, senor."

"But look back, and you will catch a glimpse of the Mustang now."

The sun was rising, and far off on the horizon the little steamer, whose coming had caused such a commotion on the island, was visible miles away, laying her course for the coast of Texas.

"A gallant ship and a brave crew," said Rafael Agramonte.

Just then there came back to meet

him his beautiful wife, captain of his amazon guard.

Stella Agramonte was indeed beautiful, hardly over twenty-one or two, possessing an exquisite form, and dressed in the picturesque costume of the Cuban amazons, and which was most becoming to her.

She wore leggings, spurs on the heels of her boots, a zouave style of pants and jacket, a closely woven Panama straw sombrero, pinned up in front with a tiny silk Cuban flag and a gold star, while she was armed with a machete and revolvers.

Her band of amazons wore a similar uniform, save it was devoid of gold lace and their star was of silver, while they carried also rifles slung at their backs.

All rode astride their saddles, and rode well, while they looked the daring amazons they were.

Saluting her husband, Stella said, as she wheeled her spirited horse alongside of him:

"I have come to report, Senor Colonel, the loss of three of your cowboy scouts killed and several wounded."

"Too bad."

"And your amazons, Stella?"

"One was killed and three wounded."

"Yes, the Spaniards fought us hard, when they knew they had to win or die."

"The dead and wounded were all brought off the field?"

"Yes, senor, save a few that might have been overlooked in the darkness."

"The Spaniards will make a score of each one found, when their report goes in."

"Now, to the Cuban cavalry and artillery?"

"There were twenty-three killed, senor, and double that number wounded."

"Our losses, then, are some thirty slain and double as many wounded."

"Yes, senor, with an offset to this of five times as heavy loss to the Spaniards, a camp wagon and officers' ambulance captured, both well filled with supplies, two hundred rifles, double that number of revolvers, swords, machetes, and many cavalry horses, to say nothing of the Riderless Regiment of Senor Taos, the Pilot."

"There were also two guns and caissons, captured, along with their horses, the prisoners were rescued, and the Mustang got out to sea in safety, and has nothing to fear from those Spanish cruisers yonder in chase," and Stella Agramonte pointed to several Spanish vessels of war now in full pursuit of the Mustang.

"Yes, the Mustang has nothing to fear now, nor have we, and our night's work has been a grand one, save for our slain and wounded comrades, and the news will rejoice General Gomez, I know, while it has taught the Spaniards that we can carry the war into their camps with a vengeance."

"Now, Stella, send one of your couriers ahead to halt the command for breakfast when we reach the first stream."

Stella, with a salute, spurred away to obey, and Andrea Taos said:

"The Cuban women are certainly showing what stern material they are made of, senor, when called upon to act."

"They are, indeed, Taos, for only think of the noble work of your sweet sister last night in going out in that storm and running the Mustang in, and guiding the cowboys to the villa, while she then took the rescued under her care."

"Marcelite is a brave girl, Senor Colonel, and will care well for those she protects."

"I am assured of that, Taos; but what is to be done with them?"

"Well, senor, Hotspur Harry, your brother, is wild to reach your lines, and had he not been in irons, he would have come with me."

"But they realize that they must remain in hiding where they are until the return of the Mustang, when they can come with the cowboys to join you."

"Yes, that they must do."

"It would be a mistake for me to make a raid after them, as the Spaniards would at once pounce down upon the little village where your parents dwell, and put them to the sword."

"They surely would do so, senor; but now they have no suspicion of the villagers."

"I will soon return to the coast, and be there to aid my sister Marcelite, and ready to go out and run the Mustang in upon her return."

"You will see her from the mountain outlook, senor, and know her signals by smoke, as agreed, and then move down to meet the cowboys and cargo, to aid in its protection, if attacked."

"Yes, so valuable a cargo must never be taken; but now we halt for breakfast," and the command went into camp, tired out, hungry, but elated at their victory.

CHAPTER XII. IN HIDING.

When Marcelite had led Lucita Agramonte up the cliff path, she said:

"The only way to reach this spot is the way we came, for there is a chasm that splits the ridge in twain, and this part of the cliff seems inaccessible."

"The path below is hidden by bushes, and no one would suspect there was one."

"But you see here is a small cavern, where the Senor Harry and Overseer Mendoza can live in safety, for there are things already there for their comfort, as we have kept the place for a quick retreat if needed."

"It is the very place, Marcelite, and we, indeed, owe much to you."

"But the Mustang is moving, I see," and Lucita pointed to the steamer, which could just be discerned through the darkness, and was moving seaward.

They could see by the light in her funnel tops that they intended to drive the steamer in her retreat from the island, for the firing had doubtless been heard from neighboring harbors, and Spanish cruisers would be forced to put to sea in search of the cause, evidently knowing that there had been a landing made somewhere on the coast.

The two girls watched the Mustang as she went seaward, saw her lay to for a short while, after she had cleared the channel, and Marcelite said:

"I really believe that my brother is coming back."

"Then he will come to your home?"

"Oh, yes, unless he is going to make his way to the mountains to see Colonel Agramonte."

"I hope that he will run no such terrible risk."

"But can we not see his boat if he returns?"

"It will be hard work to sight a small boat from here, senorita; but we will try."

"Call me Lucita, Marcelite, and do not be so formal, for we are friends in adversity together now, and, besides, we in America are not so distant toward each other."

"Thank you, Lucita, I will do as you tell me, for I find that I have in you a true friend."

"Pardon me if I ask you of a painful subject; but I know that you were engaged to a young Cuban, and I have been told that he was killed by the Spaniards."

"I cannot, will not, believe that he is dead."

"Yes, Julio Sandoz and I were engaged, and he joined the patriots, and had risen to the rank of captain of cavalry, for he was educated at a military school in the United States, and made a splendid soldier."

"It was Julio and my brother who taught me English, Lucita, and they were splendid friends, while there was not a word to be said against my lover."

"He led a charge upon a Spanish convoy some months ago, and captured the train of supplies, but what became of him in the darkness, none of his men knew, but it was rumored that he was killed, and again that he was captured and afterward put to death."

"I sincerely hope that you are right in your belief that he is alive."

"I saw him once, and he is a handsome fellow, and my brother, Rafael liked him exceedingly."

"All did who knew him, Lucita."

"Let me tell you, Marcelite, that I, too, am engaged, and to the noble American who commands the cowboys and that steamer, and who, on my account and Rafael's, is to return and fight for Cuba."

"He is a splendid man, Lucita, for I met him, you know, when I was pilot of the Mustang to-night—but will you become an amazon in the patriot ranks?"

"No, for I care not to mingle in the strife, and my sister, Rafael's wife, has done so to be near him."

"With two brothers, a lover, and Stella in the service, our family will be well enough represented without me, and I will do what I can in the hospitals for our wounded patriots."

"And I will go with you, Lucita, for I believe my parents would be safer without my being with them; but look! right down there moving toward the cove!"

"I think I see a boat."

"It is a boat, for I see it now."

"There! it has gone close in under the shadow of the point."

"Yes, and I was not mistaken, for it is my brother, and soon he will come to the cottage, or, if not, we will know that he has gone to the mountains."

"For some time longer the two Cuban girls remained on the cliff, though they could see nothing down in the cove, nor were able to longer find the Mustang."

Leading the way to a crevice in the rocks, Marcelite entered a cave, struck a match, and lighted a lantern that was there.

It was a small, dry, rock room, devoid of all reptiles, and in it were two canvas rolls, which Marcelite said were bedding.

There were rustic camp chairs there, a large box containing provisions, ropes, a rope ladder that could be unrolled to drop over the cliff to the beach, some storm clothing, wood, cooking utensils, a water cask, and large can of oil for the lanterns.

"You see, they will be safe and comfortable here, for I will give them other things to make them so, and if the Spaniards did come to our home, the Senora Mendoza could pretend to be my married sister, for I can disguise both her and yourself, so that Colonel Bartello would not recognize you, and, in fact, you can say you are one of the village girls."

"You are a good plotter, Marcelite, and I only hope that all will be well, for it would be terrible if our coming here got your parents and yourself into trouble."

With this the two girls descended to the cottage, and found that Hotspur Harry had been freed of the manacles upon his hands.

It was decided that they had better go at once to the cave, and once there, Hotspur Harry could file off the irons from Mendoza's wrists, and they would have ample time to free their ankles later on.

Marcelite and Lucita both went with them to the cave, carrying other comforts from the cottage, and there left them.

Returning to the cottage, they found that Andear Taos had not arrived, and, worn out, they were glad to retire to rest for the little that remained of the night.

CHAPTER XIII. THE RIVAL SPANIARDS.

Morning broke to find Colonel Blanco Bartello and his major, Don Ruiz Valdos, in no enviable frame of mind.

In fact, the Spanish officers and soldiers felt that the night had been a very sad defeat for them.

The Mustang had come in, landed her crew of cowboys, the villa had been stripped of men, almost, to repulse a supposed attack in force, and the prisoners there had been rescued.

Nor was this all.

It was supposed that the prisoners had been taken to sea on the Mustang, and, also, the Riderless Regiment was thought to have been a large number of cowboys who had escaped to the mountains by a flank movement, carrying with them much-needed supplies for the patriots.

Again, Col. Agramonte had escaped, in spite of his small force, and all the Spaniards had to remember were the dead soldiers in the villa and its grounds, the very heavy losses the cowboys had inflicted, the capture of two guns, cavalry horses, and many weapons taken from the dead, with the putting to sea of the Mustang in safety.

It was no wonder, then, that when Colonel Bartello returned to his quarters in the grand old Agramonte villa, and daylight revealed his terrible losses, that he was in a mood that was most dangerous, to say the least.

He had gotten in most of his reports, had learned that as many Spanish soldiers had been slain as the force of Agramonte and Captain Chase combined must have numbered, and he was pacing the floor with malignant expression upon his face, when up dashed Major Don Ruiz Valdos, and entered the villa.

"Well, senor, have you any more ill tidings to report?" he said, savagely, to the major, who was none other than the Spanish ranchero in Texas who had been a spy of Spain, and had proven a traitor to the Cowboy Clan, which he had been a member of, and escaping to Cuba, was there to do what harm he could to the patriot cause.

The lover of Lucita Agramonte when in Texas, and refused by her, he intended to have his revenge, and in his own way.

He well knew that Bartello was his rival, and also was determined to marry Lucita, the fair Texan heiress; but he would bide his time and win the game he was playing in his own way.

Both Spaniards were handsome, striking-looking men, refined in appearance, also, courtly in manner, yet with a devil in their hearts.

"You have lost your prisoners?" was Major Valdos's response to the question of his colonel.

"Carambo! do I not know that!"

"Oh, yes, but the question is as to

whether they went on the steamer or to the mountain camps of the insurgents."

"Ah! do you know which they did?"

"I know that they did not go on board the filibuster steamer."

"How do you know this?"

"I am a man to take big chances, Colonel Bartello, and I pressed close on after the cowboy band, and the prisoners did not board the steamer."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

The cowboy filibusters passed within ten feet of me in their retreat to the boat, and I not only saw that the prisoners were not with them, but heard Captain Chase call out to his lieutenant, Jack Harding, that they would be safe in their hiding place until they could reach the camp of Gomez."

"You heard this?"

"I did."

"And more, when the cowboys reached the shore, the larger number of them, I should say, did not board the steamer, but rode up the cove and reached the ridge highway by some path known to a guide, so joined Agramonte, without a doubt."

"Yes, the officer in command of the party with two guns, I sent to establish an outpost a mile beyond the spot where the mountain trail comes into the highway, escaped with only half a dozen men, for your accursed American cowboys charged them, captured their guns, and Agramonte ambushed them, so they had no chance."

The command was literally cut to pieces, and the artillery and wagons were taken."

"This is terrible, indeed, Senor Colonel."

"But now the question is as to where those prisoners are in hiding."

"I will at once have a thorough search made."

"Pardon me, but as I discovered that they neither left the island nor went up to the mountains, but are in hiding, I claim the right to find them in their retreat."

Colonel Bartello was only too anxious to get possession of the prisoners again, so would not find fault with the manner in which it was done, and so replied:

"All right, Don Ruiz, do so, and in your own way; but remember, the Senorita Agramonte is to be placed again under my charge, and the other prisoners also."

"Of course, Colonel Bartello."

"I will begin my search as soon as we have breakfasted; but, remember, I shall consider the Senorita Agramonte as much my prisoner as yours," and with this the traitor Spanish cowboy left the colonel to his unhappy meditations.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DON'S ALLY.

The morning after the tragic scenes of the night landing of the cowboys, a youth of twenty came out of the Wild Flower Villa, dressed in the picturesque garb of the Boy Bugler, which the latter had discarded as a prisoner for another suit, when he and Mendoza were planning an escape.

The handsome Mexican costume, with its velvet jacket, buttons, and gold lace, its leggings and corduroy pants, along with the embroidered sombrero, had been at once appropriated by a youth whose position at headquarters no one seemed to exactly know, as to just what it was, save, perhaps, Colonel Blanco Bartello, upon whose staff he claimed to be an officer, though his rank was not stated.

He was a handsome fellow, some said

a Spaniard, but the Spanish soldiers claimed that he was a Cuban.

He had come to the plantation with Colonel Bartello, and appeared to be a pet of that officer, for he went and came at will, and had the freedom of the villa.

In his investigation of the contents of the villa, he had happened upon the elegant Mexican saddle and bridle that belonged to Rafael Agramonte, and had been brought by him from Mexico.

The youth possessed a fine horse, which he had also appropriated from the Agramonte stables, and observing that Hotspur Harry, the Boy Bugler, had discarded his very elegant suit for some reason, and that it would just about fit him, he had promptly donned it.

The youth had never worn a Spanish uniform, a rather certain indication that he was not an officer, but had always dressed with a style peculiarly his own.

When he appeared before Colonel Bartello in the costume of the Boy Bugler, that officer made no comment, merely smiling.

But Major Ruiz Valdos knew well where the costume and saddle had come from, and his lip curled with contempt, for he had not liked the rather fresh youth whom he so often saw in the villa.

The name of this odd young man was Manuel Munoz, and he appeared to be amply supplied with funds.

Colonel Bartello spoke of him, when he did refer to Manuel Munoz at all, as his orderly, though if he had ever performed regular duties as such, the Spanish soldiers had not discovered the fact.

Upon the morning when he is presented to the reader, the youth came out of the villa, mounted his horse, and rode away in the direction of the grand gateway.

Upon the way he met face to face Major Ruiz Valdos, returning from the direction from whence the cowboys had come on their raid the night before.

Seeing Manuel Munoz, Don Ruiz drew rein and said:

"Munoz, I wish to speak with you."

"Yes, Senor Major."

"I do not care as to what position you hold at headquarters, or what hold you have upon Colonel Bartello; but I have taken your measure, and I am sure you can be useful to me."

"What can I do for the senor?"

"You are a bright, clever fellow, I know, but that you are a scamp I am equally as certain of—"

"Senor!"

"Don't make any mistake as to becoming angry with me, for I am not one to trifle with, and I tell you frankly, you can serve me well, and I will pay well for your services."

"Senor Major, I am willing to serve you."

"You are wise."

"What can I do, senor, to win the pay you promise me?"

"You are not a Cuban?"

"A Spaniard, senor."

"But you pretend to be a Cuban?"

"For reasons I need not state to you, Senor Major."

"I do not ask you."

"But answer what I ask you, and we can come to terms."

"Yes, senor."

"You have spent some time about this part of the island?"

"Yes, senor."

"I was the private secretary upon the Palma Plantation, some leagues from here."

"You knew Rafael Agramonte?"

"Yes, senor, and his beautiful wife,

as well as the lovely Senorita Lucita, who lived with them."

"You were not on social terms with them?"

"No, senor."

"I was but a poor secretary to the rich Senor Palma."

"And you now serve Colonel Bartello?"

"Yes, senor."

"But can do pretty much as you please, go at will, and are not responsible for your time or acts?"

"No, senor."

"Then you are just the man to serve me."

"Thanks, senor, I am not averse to making a snug sum in gold."

"All right, serve me well and I will pay you big money; but deceive or betray me, and I will kill you."

"I will be true, senor."

"Well, what I wish you to do is to find out where the prisoners who escaped from the villa last night are in hiding, for they did not go to the mountains, nor did they leave on the filibuster steamer."

"I have lived in Texas, and learned how to trail while there, and already have I tracked the party from the spot where they left the cowboys, and took a path leading through the woodland along the ridge."

"They went into the woodland, but the ground was such I lost their trail, and yet I know they must be in hiding somewhere about a cliff that overhangs a small fishing village, some miles from here."

"Why, not in the village, Senor Major?"

"Ah! would they dare go there?"

"They might, for there are those there who might conceal them."

"Well, I have told you what I have discovered, so it is for you to find them."

"When you have done so, come to me, but let no one else know."

"I understand, Senor Major."

"When I have them in my power I will pay you one thousand pesos, so now start off on your search, and you know where to find me," and the don rode on, while the youth continued his ride out upon the highway.

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG SPY.

Both Marcelite Taos and her parents knew that it would be no easy task to keep their guests concealed in their home.

They knew that most of the people of the village could be trusted, and yet one traitor might be among them, to betray the presence of the prisoners there.

This would mean ruin to the Taos family, perhaps death.

But they did not shrink from the ordeal.

They had been most kindly treated by the Aquilar family, into which Rafael Agramonte had married, and both Stella, his wife, and the planter had been warm friends to them.

Then, too, Lucita, since coming to Cuba to visit her brother and his wife, had many a time ridden over to the little cottage, followed by a servant with a basket of edibles for the Taos family, and taken from the villa table.

Lucita had carried books to Marcelite, and given her many little gifts besides, for she greatly admired the handsome Cuban girl, and felt the deepest sympathy for her and her parents in their having become so poor after once being prosperous and moving in refined society.

But then Lucita knew that the elder

Andrea Taos was a fugitive, hiding under the disguise of a fisherman, and under an assumed name, for his deeds as a patriot in the Ten Years' War.

The family, then, were only too willing to risk much to give Lucita and those with her shelter in their home.

The day following the battle with the cowboys, Marcelite secured a basket of fine fish from one of their neighbors, and then putting on her disguise, as a fisherlad, slipped out of the rear of the cottage and went to a point beyond the cliff, where her father met her in his skiff.

Andrea Taos, Senior, had made an agreement to furnish the Spanish officers with fresh fish twice a week, for he hoped to glean news in going to the villa that would be useful to his son.

As Marcelite in her disguise had gone on one occasion, she made up her mind to do so again, and no one seeing her with her hair cut short, her face browned and purposely soiled, her white teeth darkened, and form hidden under her ill-fitting suit and storm coat, would have ever known that she was in reality not a youth, but a beautiful girl.

Leaving her father to await her return at the cliff, Marcelite sailed on up the coast in the little fishing skiff, and, passing the point of land where the cowboys had landed, saw there a crowd of Spanish soldiers, and a lifeboat drawn up on the beach.

"That is the boat from the steamer, and which Brother Andrea came ashore in last night."

"But did he go on to the mountain camps, or was he captured?" and the thought caused the girl's heart to throb with dread for her brother's fate.

The Spaniards were too busy with their own troubles to notice the skiff, and Marcelite pushed on until she came to the lagoon, half a mile from the villa.

Into this she ran, landed, and, taking her basket of fish, went on up the hill.

At the summit were two guns, and a sentinel, and he halted her.

Telling him her errand, and giving him a fish for himself, she went on to the villa.

The grounds were cut up with hoof tracks, and Spanish soldiers were gathering together their dead comrades to bury them in the graves being dug for them on the cliff near the ashes of the overseer's house.

Going to the kitchen of the villa, the young girl found there, as she had expected, the negro cook of the Agramontes, and who had been forced to serve the Spaniards.

The woman remembered the pretended lad from her former visit, and so motioned her to be cautious and took the basket of fish.

Then the two talked together in a low tone, and Marcelite was told by the cook how she had overheard Don Ruiz Valdos tell Colonel Bartelo that he knew that the prisoners had not gone off on the filibuster steamer, nor up into the mountains with the large band of cowboys.

"But no cowboys went up into the mountains," urged Marcelite.

"Oh, yes, they did," was the reply, and Marcelite was told how the Spaniards had been attacked by a large troop of cowboys, but which the reader knows were only Andrea Taos, the pilot, and his Riderless Regiment.

This news was a surprise to Marcelite, and now aware that the prisoners were known not to have gone on the Mustang or up to the mountains, she well knew a hunt would be made to ferret out their hiding place, and she was anxious to

get back home with all dispatch and report the discovery she had made while playing the spy.

Halting at the guns, where the sentinel stood, she gave him some wheat bread and other edibles she had gotten from the cook for him, and thus gained his confidence and loosened his tongue.

In her quiet way, playing the part of a curious boy, she asked scores of questions, and got from him all the information that he could give her.

Hastening on to her boat, she was soon on her way home, and running into the point where she had left her father, she went ashore while he sailed the skiff around into the basin.

Entering her home by the rear garden, the fair young spy saw that a visitor had just arrived.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARCELITE'S VISITOR.

Marcelite found her mother most anxious about her upon her return, for the Senora Taos had recognized the visitor and knew that he had come to see her daughter.

"Tell him that I will soon come out to see him, mother."

"But, my child—"

"Do as I tell you, mother, for I know that which you do not, and that man must not be made angry."

The senora obeyed with a sigh, going out upon the piazza to meet the visitor who had just arrived, while Marcelite hastened to make her toilet.

Lucita Agramonte was in her room and cried:

"I am so glad to see you back again, Marcelite, but do you know that Manuel Munoz is here, for I saw him ride up to the gate?"

"He is the clerk of Senor Palma, you know, and a bold, bad youth, I am sure, for I never liked him."

"I know Manuel Munoz but too well, Lucita, for he has honored me with his hateful attentions, and when I told him that I never could regard him with even friendship, he vowed that he would some day have revenge upon me and mine."

"But I must see him now, for it is my duty in the light of what I know, as you will understand when I tell you what I have discovered," and all the while Marcelite was hastily making her toilet, aided by Lucita.

At length she was ready, and a pretty hat drawn down over her head hid the fact that her hair had been cut off.

Never had she looked more beautiful, for her face was flushed with excitement, and so thought her visitor as she stepped out upon the piazza.

It was indeed Manuel Munoz, and he prided himself that he was looking his best in the handsome costume he had appropriated of the boy bugler.

He was being entertained by Senora Taos, but rose quickly and greeted Marcelite most courteously.

To his surprise she gave him a rather cordial welcome, bade him resume his seat, and, as her mother left, the conversation turned upon the landing of the cowboys during the night.

"There must have been a thousand of them, Senora Marcelite, and they were superbly mounted and armed to the teeth, while there was a large force of rebels attacking us from the mountains, and we were then caught between two fires."

"As it was, had I not discovered the force of the rebels under that arch traitor, Rafael Agramonte, I fear the villa

would have been destroyed and much more damage done.

"But we beat them back at every point, and killed many of them, while we forced the Americans to fly to the mountains, and their steamer barely had time to get away."

"We captured all the cargo that was landed, and altogether it was a grand night for Spanish arms, senorita."

"Yes, grand indeed, Senor Captain Munoz," replied Marcelite, and the young scamp seemed delighted at the title given him, and said modestly:

"You have heard, then, of my promotion?"

"You are captain, are you not?"

"Oh, yes, now, though I do not claim my title, you know."

"But I thought I would tell you, Senorita Marcelite, and so I came."

"You were very kind, senor captain."

"And then I had another motive in coming."

"Yes?"

"You know that we had some prisoners up at the villa?"

"Yes, I had heard so, and I was sorry to hear that Senorita Agramonte and her brother were held as prisoners."

"Ah! But you do not know that girl, and her brother is an arch-traitor and a most desperate young devil."

"I thought the senorita and her brother were Americans?"

"That does not matter, for they aid the rebels and should suffer accordingly."

"But let me tell you that they escaped last night in some mysterious manner."

"Escaped?"

"Yes, they and the Overseer Mendoza and his wife and child, along with the senorita's maid."

"How did it happen, senor captain?"

"You see I was called to the front with my command, and they took advantage of the landing of the filibusters and escaped."

"Ah! and have left the island?"

"No."

"But joined the insurgents?"

"No."

"You recaptured them?"

"No, not yet."

"But I can do so."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, for they are in hiding and not half a dozen miles from the villa."

"You know where they are then?"

"I do."

Marcelite did not even wince at this, but replied:

"Then you will soon have them captive again?"

"That depends?"

"Upon what?"

"Upon you, Senorita Marcelite."

"I do not understand you, senor captain."

"I will make myself plain then."

"Pray do so?"

"I happen to be the only one who knows where those prisoners are, and by recapturing them I will gain another promotion and receive the very large reward which Colonel Bartello offers for their apprehension, and you are to decide for me what I will do."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THREAT.

Marcelite looked the young spy squarely in the face.

Whatever she felt at his words she did not reveal it by look or act.

He seemed a little nonplussed at her coolness, where he had expected to see her alarmed, for, though he suspected that she might know where the prisoners

were, he was not sure of it by any means.

Without continuing in the strain he had been talking, he suddenly asked:

"Where is your brother now, senorita?"

"My brother sailed for the United States some time ago to get work, as the war here had really ruined all chances of making money in his line."

"I did hear that he had joined the insurgents."

"Indeed!"

"If true that will be a severe blow to my parents, for you know he is our only support, and father is getting old."

"It may not be true, and you would doubtless know if it were."

"We would be sure to, unless he wished to keep the secret from us."

"And have no men from this village gone to join the insurgents?"

"I believe my brother is the only one that has left here, and, as I told you, he left for the United States."

"We are a poor and peaceful people here, the village is composed mostly of women, children, old men, and boys, for the young men are off at sea on voyages."

"If the villagers are wise they will keep peaceful, for a visit of Spaniards would mean trouble for them."

"I believe they all feel that."

"Do you know yet whether the man who was my successful rival for your love is dead or alive?"

"You refer to Senor Julio Sandoz?"

"Yes, unless I have other rivals."

"When last we heard of him he was reported killed," and again Marcelite did not flinch.

"Then I stand the better chance in winning you now, Senorita Marcelite?"

"I have given you your answer, senor."

"Well, I wish you to reconsider it, and I'll tell you why."

"I shall be glad to learn why I should, for I see no reason."

"In the first place I happen to know that the prisoners who escaped from the villa are in hiding under your care."

"You have them either hidden in your house or somewhere near here."

"They did not go to the landing place of the filibuster, so did not sail in the steamer."

"They did not go to the insurgent camps, for I tracked them in this direction, and the trail was an easy one to follow, as that Satan's imp, young Agramonte, and Overseer Mendoza were in irons, and their chains frequently dragged along the path."

"Then, too, the tracks of Senorita Agramonte were so tiny they could not be mistaken, while those of Senora Mendoza and the quadroon maid Flora were visible, as well as one other, doubtless their guide."

"They came toward this village, and I know are in hiding here."

"It is my duty to report this at once to Colonel Bartello, and you know that he would send soldiers here to lay this village in ashes."

"But I wish to be merciful, and I tell you, Senorita Marcelite, if you will pledge me your word to become my wife within, say, three days, I will spare you and this village, and allow your friends to escape, for I know that you are heart and soul in sympathy with the insurgents."

The young Spaniard had risen and was looking Marcelite straight in the face.

She had turned deadly pale, yet she was perfectly calm.

After a moment she answered him, and her words were coolly uttered:

"I deny nothing, I admit nothing, senor."

"But well I know what a visit of Spanish soldiers would mean, sent here in anger upon the people of this village."

"It is my home, their home, all that we have."

"The people are doing no wrong, and they should not be visited with death and ruin for the sake of others."

"I have told you that I did not love you, but to save these villagers I am willing to forget that, and I act for them, not because I have others in hiding, as you accuse me of having."

"I will therefore say to you if you will come to-morrow to see me you shall have my answer."

The young man was somewhat taken aback at this.

He had expected a decided refusal, and afterward a yielding under the pressure of death to those she concealed.

He saw that she was acting for the villagers, and this made him doubtful if the escaped prisoners were really in the village or not.

But he said:

"It is now one o'clock, senorita."

"I will not give you until to-morrow, for by night the hiding place of those fugitives can be changed."

"I will give you until six o'clock today, for then I shall return, and if you refuse, a Spanish regiment will come to this village to-morrow, and you well know what that means."

"I do."

"You shall have your answer to-day," and Marcelite bowed at Manuel Munoz, turned, and left the cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FUGITIVES.

Marcelite did not waver until she saw the young Spanish spy mount his horse and ride away.

Then she uttered a low moan and said:

"In God's name, what shall I do?"

"Marcelite, come in here."

It was Lucita who called her, and, as she entered the little sitting room, she said:

"Marcelite, your mother and I heard all, for we did not wish to leave you alone with that villain, and I had my revolver ready had he given me cause to use it."

"The fellow is dressed in my brother Harry's clothing, hat and all, and he is riding brother Rafael's horse, saddle, and bridle."

"I heard his threat, and I wish to say that when he has your answer, the moment he is gone, we will start for the mountains, and when the Spaniards come they will not find us."

"No, no, Lucita, that will never do."

"It is a long, rugged climb, and, though you might stand it, with your nerve and will, the senora and her child never could, and to find even the latter here would cause the village to be put in ashes."

"No, I have two plans for you, one being to go aboard the Flying Fish at night, and sail for Key West, for both your brother and Mendoza are good sailors."

"I dare not leave, as that would bring ruin upon all here."

"Another plan is to let your brother and Senor Mendoza go to the mountain camp, leaving as soon as I can get them disguises, and you, Senora Mendoza and the child, with Flora, can take refuge in the cave in the cliff, and then the Spaniards can search all they will."

"This plan is the best, Marcelite, for Harry knows the way well, and you can

disguise them in some way, should they be seen."

"Yes."

"I saw a Spanish gunboat running into the lagoon when I came back from the villa, and the officers of the cruiser generally land for a hunt on shore, if they stay any time in harbor, and I have a midshipman's uniform, cap, and sword, and a sailor's suit also, so your brother can wear the one, Mendoza the other, and, with a shotgun, start for the mountains, for Spanish soldiers will never suspect them."

"I will have father take some fish to the gunboat to learn her name, and if Senor Harry and Mendoza meet Spanish soldiers they can say that they are from the cruiser."

"In the cave you and the others will be safe, and I will see that you have supplies for several days, in case a spy should be set to watch if I left the cottage."

"That is the very plan, Marcelite, and if you will get these sailor suits we will go at once to the cave, for the sooner they start the better."

"So I think."

"I will get them at once."

Soon after Marcelite and Lucita left the cottage, each carrying bundles, and gliding through the garden they began to ascend the steep path to the cave.

They found Hotspur Harry and Mendoza on the watch, and the two had seen from their high lookout the fleet Mustang quickly drop her pursuer astern, and then one of those in chase of the cowboy craft run back and seek a harbor in the lagoon.

They could also see Senor Taos in his fishing skiff coming out of the basin on his way to the cruiser with fish for sale.

The two heard the story the maidens had to tell and decided that it was best for them to start for the mountains with all haste.

"This is a snug retreat, sister, dry and pleasant, and you can sit here and enjoy the view, only do not go out on the rocks, to be seen from up and down the coast," said the handsome and dashing young cowboy.

Soon after Marcelite and Lucita bade the Boy Bugler and Mendoza good-by and then departed, to return later with Senora Mendoza, her child, and Flora, with other supplies needful for the fugitives while in hiding.

Putting on their suits, both Hotspur Harry and Mendoza found them all that they could desire.

Hotspur Harry had the suit of a Spanish midshipman, gold lace cap, and all, and he bound a sash about his waist for his revolvers and to hang his sword to also.

Marcelite had brought him a shotgun to further carry out the idea that he had landed for a hunt ashore, and Mendoza, wearing a sailor's uniform, carried a large game bag, and he also had a revolver and sword.

In the game bag was some food for them on the way, and when all ready they crept from their hiding place, down the path to the bushes at the base of the cliff, through them to the pathway leading up to the ridge.

No one saw them, and, gaining the ridge, they started on at a quick pace, anxious to get out of the woodland, cross the highway, and reach the mountains, where they felt they would be safe.

They had left the woodland behind them, and were nearing the highway, when suddenly they came upon two Spanish soldiers face to face.

Both parties seemed surprised, but Hotspur Harry said quickly;

"Well, men, have you seen any game about here?"

"We see the game we are after, now, for I know you, accursed Americano," was the reply of one of the men, wearing a sergeant's rank upon his arm.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOTSPUR HARRY'S DUEL.

There was no use arguing the matter, both Hotspur Harry and Mendoza well knew.

They were recognized, for the two fugitives saw, in the sergeant and his companion, their guard in the villa, who had treated them with inhumanity.

Instantly Harry sprang upon the sergeant with his light officer's sword, for he did not care to fire a revolver there.

"At your man, Mendoza, and show no mercy!" cried Hotspur.

Mendoza had drawn his sword, and instantly the four men were engaged in hot combat.

But the two Spaniards were armed with that desperate weapon at close quarters, the Cuban machete, and Mendoza's light blade was shivered at the first blow, while his adversary brought the heavy machete down upon him with a force that cut him down like a weed.

At the same instant the sword of Hotspur Harry was broken off a foot from the hilt, though he had been more than holding his own with the large sergeant, in spite of the difference in weapons.

But, ere the sergeant could follow up his advantage, and his comrade, whom he called to his aid, could come, Harry had drawn his revolver in his left hand, and once, twice it rang out.

The two shots had been fired with Texan rapidity as when he was the Boy Bugler of the Cowboy Clan.

The sergeant dropped, a bullet between his eyes, and the Spanish soldier staggered backward and fell within a few feet of Mendoza.

"Poor Mendoza! They have done for you," cried the young cowboy in voice that quivered with emotion.

He was about to kneel by the side of his dead comrade when he heard the rapid clatter of hoofs, and from behind a thick hedge suddenly appeared a horseman.

But Hotspur Harry, his broken sword in one hand, his revolver in the other, turned from the dead bodies and confronted his new foe, in whom he recognized Manuel Munoz, now rigged out in his own Mexican cowboy costume!

Manuel reined his horse back quickly, when he came upon the young cowboy. He had heard the revolver shots, and had come to investigate.

Only a short while before he had parted with those two men, now dead, and had sent them on a hunt for the prisoners, to search the cliff, and keep watch upon the home of Andrea Taos.

The hedge had concealed them from view entirely. With a bound his horse came upon the scene of the combat.

Could he have retreated he would have done so; but it was too late.

He had a revolver in his belt and a machete hung to his saddle horn on the left side.

But Munoz was not a brave youth, unless he had the advantage.

He saw the two Spanish soldiers lying dead, and recognized the form of the overseer, Mendoza, also dead.

But the Boy Bugler was before him and very much alive, so, as he could not retreat, he essayed a game of bluff and called out:

"I do not wish to kill you, Agramonte,

but I will do so unless you at once surrender. I have a number of men near to call upon."

Hotspur laughed, for the young Texan had fortunately decided to make the fellow prisoner or to kill him.

If he killed him he would have his horse and his suit, and could thus pass any of the enemy he might meet, for he would be thought to be the young Spaniard.

"I shall not surrender; so here goes to fight it out," was Hotspur's defiant reply.

That was a challenge to a fight to the death, and Munoz could not evade it.

With trembling hand he whipped out his revolver, but the young Texan's weapon cracked first.

The revolver of the young Spaniard also exploded, but the bullet flew wide of its mark.

Harry had aimed for the head, and a red spot in the forehead showed where the bullet had entered.

Ere the youth toppled from his saddle the lithe Texan sprang forward and grasping the bridle rein of the splendid horse stayed his flight and escape.

He also managed to break the fall of the young Spaniard and let him down gently.

Then he lost no time. Stripping the form of his own handsome suit, he drew it on, put on the sombrero, and, rolling up the midshipman's uniform, he tied it to the saddle, with all of the weapons of the others, for he knew that they were worth their weight in silver to the patriots.

That done he lifted the body of his comrade, Vance Mendoza, and, placing it across the horse behind the saddle, strapped it there securely, yet so that he could drop it quickly if he had to run for it.

Mounting the horse then he rode on his way, sorrowing at the death of poor Mendoza, yet rejoicing in his own good fortune.

CHAPTER XX.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

If Hotspur had taken particular notice of the young spy, after he had stripped him of his clothing, he would have seen that he was not dead, for the eyes had opened and quickly closed, and the breast rose and fell with the pulsations of life.

Had he examined the wound he would have seen that the bullet, though it hit the head, had glanced, cut under the scalp, and forced its way out on the top of the head.

It had stunned Munoz, but did no further damage than that, and inflicting only a flesh wound.

The young Spaniard returned to consciousness as the Texas boy was about his work of collecting the weapons in a bundle.

He saw the youth mount and ride away, carrying the dead body of Overseer Mendoza.

Only when Hotspur was well out of sight did Manuel arise and examine his wounded head carefully. He was not long in discovering that he was only slightly wounded.

Binding a scarf taken from the neck of the sergeant about his head, though he felt somewhat weak and dizzy, he set to work to disrobe the Spanish private, as one nearest his size, and to don his clothing.

Then he started upon his march over a league to the villa to make his report to Major Don Ruiz Valdos, and decide with him what was best to tell

the colonel, for if the rest of the fugitives were to be found he wished to find them to earn his reward.

Meanwhile Harry, riding on his way, had come out upon the highway where was a Spanish outpost of three men.

They saw him at the instant he discovered them, and he was preparing to fight his way past when he observed that they were not showing any hostility, and one called out:

"Ho, Senor Munoz, you've got big game there."

Hotspur spoke Spanish like a Spaniard, and quickening the pace of his horse, he rode on, glad to see that the men stood in the dense shadow of some trees.

"Yes, one of the escaped prisoners, but they got two soldiers before this one fell, I'm going on to report."

"It was Sergeant Dervas and Private Adolpho, for they passed here an hour ago, just before you did, senor."

"Yes," and the daring boy pushed on, and the outpost was left behind. He knew that the turn off to the mountains was half a mile away, and expected that an outpost would be there also.

But he knew that he had to go through the pass at that point, or continue on along the highway and face many soldiers, so he prepared to risk the outpost.

On he hastened, and at last came in sight of a mounted sentinel. Manuel had not been friendly with any of the soldiers, and, therefore, knew none of them very well.

Consequently the outpost sentinels might be readily deceived.

He had heard the guard over Mendoza and himself in the villa say that the young Spaniard, after appropriating his, Hotspur Harry's, costume, and robing himself in it, had taken great care to show himself off before all the soldiers.

Then, too, they all knew that Manuel rode the splendid black horse belonging to Rafael Agramonte, with its Mexican saddle and bridle.

"I can fool them, I reckon, but if I don't I can fight for it," he decided as he pushed on toward the sentinel.

The horseman was just where he could not only see up and down the highway, but also look through the pass, which was the mountain trail.

As he drew nearer, Harry saw a group of half a dozen horsemen seated under the shadow of the ridge their horses being near.

"Well, I'm in for it," he muttered.

On he rode; the sentinel recognized him as Munoz, and gazed with surprise upon the body drawn across the back of his horse.

Drawing his knife he thrust the blade up the sleeve of his left hand so he could hastily cut the straps that held the body if he had to let it go to save himself.

He saw that the sentinel was getting ready to challenge him, in spite of the apparent recognition, so he called out in an authoritative tone, remembering the names of the sergeant and private:

"Ho, men, ride at once up the highway to the other post, and bring in the prisoners there. I have one here, as you see, and you'll find both Sergeant Dervas and Private Adolpho there dead."

This prevented the challenge, for the other troopers near the ridge heard what was said, leaped into their saddles, and rode off, when, waiting until he saw them out of call, Hotspur rode closer to the sentinel and suddenly leveling his revolver at him cried:

"I want you!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TO THE PATRIOT CAMP.

The sentinel was thoroughly taken aback, still believing that it was Manuel Munoz with whom he had to deal.

He could not understand why he had been so set upon by Colonel Bartello's aide, for the soldiers so regarded the youth, through courtesy.

"What have I done, senor, to cause your anger?"

"You are a Spaniard, I am an American filibuster, serving the Cuban patriots, so we are foes. Will you surrender, or shall I shoot you?"

The sentinel, a man of nerve, was instantly on guard. A closer look convinced him that it was not Manuel Munoz he had to deal with, but young Agramonte.

Through his brain shot a vision of promotion did he capture him, and, believing, if taken a prisoner to the patriot camp, they would treat him as did the Spaniards the Cubans, he at once resolved on Harry's capture.

"Senor, I can but submit. What is your will?"

"To disarm you and take you to the patriot camp."

"I surrender, senor. Here are my weapons."

The Spaniard made a sudden effort to draw a revolver—in fact, got it from his belt; but he was not quick enough for the young Texan, who read his intention in his face, and instantly raised his own weapon and pulled the trigger.

As he did so the sentinel's horse made a spring forward, and the plucky Spaniard, though falling from the saddle, fired his revolver once, twice.

One bullet cut through Hotspur's sombrero, the second pierced the flesh of his left arm.

But the Spaniard was dead ere he struck the ground.

Catching the rein of his horse, Hotspur leaped to the ground, untied the body of Mendoza, and threw it across the saddle of the animal the sentinel had ridden, and was strapping it fast, when he saw coming at a gallop down the highway no less a person than his one-time comrade of the Cowboy Clan, and later traitor, Don Ruiz Valdos.

He felt sure that he would be taken for Manuel Munoz at first, and as he fastened the body securely he muttered:

"Now to have it out with that man. I'll risk life a dozen times to take Don Ruiz Valdos a prisoner."

He threw the rein of the horse over his head, leaped into his saddle, and turned to meet the traitor.

But as he did so, he saw in the direction the Spaniards he had sent up the highway returning at a full run.

The shots had alarmed them, and, while one went on to investigate, the others returned to their post, now frightened at having left it.

They were also fully as near as was the major, and, bold as he was, Hotspur Harry knew it would be sheer madness to tarry there to attempt to have it out with Don Ruiz Valdos.

Shaking the machete of the dead sentinel at the coming Spanish officer and clutching the other weapons of the slain man and his ammunition belt as well, Hotspur shouted:

"Another time, Don Ruiz, you and I shall meet!"

Then for the first time the Spaniard saw that the youth he had supposed to be Manuel Munoz was the escaped prisoner—the young Texan dare devil—Hotspur Harry!

With a yell of rage, Don Ruiz spurred

forward, shouting to the coming soldiers:

"That is the American prisoner, Agramonte! A hundred pesos to the man who captures him alive!"

The troopers gave a cheer and dashed forward the faster.

But Hotspur had taken in the situation and away he went toward the ridge pass.

He had just reached it when the Spaniards opened fire, and, with Major Don Ruiz Valdos leading, came on in hot pursuit.

Retarded by the horse he was leading and the weapons he carried, Harry was almost tempted to let go the one and throw down the other, but he would not do so, after a moment's thought, knowing that the weapons and the horse and his accoutrements were much needed by the patriots.

So he tried strategy. Fastening the weapons as best he could, he suddenly took off his sombrero, and waving it temporarily, drew rein and shouted:

"Come on, men! Here is the traitor, Don Ruiz!"

This trick was successful, the effect upon the major and his men electrical, for, as one man they wheeled their horses and dashed back, lying low in their saddles and driving spurs deep, evidently believing they were dashing upon an ambush of those terrible American cowboys, and Major Valdos knew but too well what he had to expect from the comrades he had betrayed.

Hotspur broke into loud laughter, and rode rapidly on, no longer in danger from the pursuers.

Just before sunset he came upon a patriot outpost, and his name was called by a Texas cowboy, who was in command, so he had safely run the dangerous gauntlet.

CHAPTER XXII.

WON BY PLUCK.

Hotspur Harry received a warm greeting from his cowboy comrades, to whom he quickly told the story of his adventures.

He was told that it was the advance post of the Cuban army that he had come upon, and a dozen men were there on duty, the cowboy being in charge.

Further up the mountain a mile was a camp of a couple of hundred Cubans and a light gun, and still further on was a large camp in a fort, with two guns.

Then came the quarters of Colonel Agramonte, with the rest of his command, his amazon body guard and cowboy scouts.

"You see that the Spaniards cannot surprise us, Hotspur; but you have done splendidly, and let me tell you your brother and sister Stella will be mighty glad to see you," said the Texan.

"Where is Pilot Taos?" asked the boy.

"In camp with Colonel Agramonte."

"Glad to hear that, for we were anxious about him. The boys got up to the patriot camp after all, I was glad to know."

The cowboy laughed and said:

"No, but their ponies did; for that was the pilot's riderless regiment."

"You don't want men to scare these Spaniards, for a drove of horses will do as well," and the cowboy told the story of the charge of Andrea Taos and his riderless regiment.

After a short halt, Harry was sent on in charge of a Cuban, so that he would have no trouble, and arrived at his brother's headquarters before the bugle had sounded "taps."

The welcome that he received from one and all certainly gladdened his heart,

and after Rafael Agramonte had heard his story and instructed his surgeon to dress the wound in his arm, he said:

"Well, Harry, you have won your commission, certainly, as I will appoint you my aide de camp with the rank of lieutenant, but you shall still be the Boy Bugler of the Cowboy Clan also."

"To-morrow we will ride up to the camp of General Gomez, and he will have President Cisneros Betancourt give you your commission."

"Then, Harry, we will have to plan to meet gallant Charlie Chase and his cowboy filibusters when they land. You can take the escort to the coast to join them, and bring back with you Lucita and those in hiding with her, for good Taos here is to leave in a day or two and will see them and settle everything so that there will be no mistake."

"There will be no mistake, Brother Rafael, if Senor Taos arranges it. His sister is just as clever and daring as he is, and I only hope that she'll get into no trouble through protecting us."

"I sincerely hope not, Harry, and I think it would be well for her parents and herself to come up with us, for when you go to the coast I will have a large force close at hand to protect your retreat."

"My sister would not leave the villagers, senor, after having done ought to bring the ill will of the Spaniards upon them."

"Nor would my parents leave," said Andrea Taos.

"Then they must not be implicated in any way," said Rafael Agramonte.

"And, brother, I do not think I should, as a boy, receive an officer's commission, but Taos here is the one to—"

"That is all right, Harry, for the president to-day sent Andrea Taos a commission which his pluck and skill have worthily won, and he is now a captain del marina in the Cuban service, and will some day have a ship I hope," said Colonel Agramonte.

Soon after the party turned in for the night, and the next day Hotspur Harry rode with his brother and Captain Taos to headquarters, the amazon escort accompanying them.

Hotspur felt honored in meeting the Cuban president and General Gomez, and promptly received the commission he had so gallantly won.

"Your father was one of our most trusted generals in the Ten Years' War; your brother, here, was one of its boy heroes, and you are already following in their footsteps, I am proud to say," said General Gomez.

Several days after, having so arranged their plans that there should be no mistake, Andrea Taos quietly slipped away upon his return to the coast.

He was accompanied far beyond the last patriot camp by Lieutenant Harry, who then bade him good-by.

From there on he was to go on foot, and it was just dark when Hotspur saw him start on his twenty-mile tramp by night.

"Take the trail I mapped out for you, Senor Harry, and it will get you to the coast and avoid all Spanish outposts."

"The only thing to be careful about is to watch for Spaniards in crossing the highway, and I would advise you to send a couple of scouts ahead who know the country."

"The trail will lead you to the cove where the Mustang last landed, and where I will bring her in again, and I'll run for harbor early, so as to have the night for unloading and packing the mules."

"You had better be close to the high-

way by nightfall, so you can get to the cave to meet the steamer."

With this repeated advice Taos set out on his perilous tramp to the coast.

CHAPTER XXIII. THE SPY'S PLOT.

When Major Don Ruiz Valdos turned and fled, under the supposed attack of the comrades he had betrayed, he did as officers should do in an advance, but not in a retreat, led his men.

He got out of it cleverly when he discovered that they were not pursued, by saying his horse ran away with him, and he showed a broken rein to prove it.

"One of that young devil's tricks!" he muttered.

"I should have known better."

"But how is it I find him dressed up in the suit Manuel Munoz stole from him and Mendoza dead?"

"Where is that fellow Munoz I sent to find the prisoners?"

"I guess he found them."

With this he put the men back on their post, said he would send for the body of their dead companion, heard the story that Hotspur Harry had told them about the prisoners, and that one of their number had continued on up the highway.

Then he rode on up the highway to suddenly come upon the soldier returning and behind him Manuel Munoz.

The young man, with his face smeared with blood and in the clothes of a private soldier, did not look very prepossessing.

But the soldier was told to dismount and walk on to where his comrades were, while Manuel Munoz took his horse and went back toward headquarters with the major.

On the way he told his story, Don Ruiz Valdos listening with a face black with rage.

"I sent the sergeant and man to search the ridges, and he killed them both."

"Then you came up and he very nearly killed you."

"Yes, señor, and believes now that I am dead; but it was a close call."

"Very."

"But Mendoza, his companion was killed?"

"Yes, señor major, I shot him as I rode up," said Manuel Munoz with ready lie.

"Or that boy did?"

"No, señor major, the sergeant had been killed; Mendoza and the soldier were fighting as I rode up, and so I shot the insurgent first, as that boy fired upon the man."

"Before I could fire again he pulled trigger on me, and when I came to I was lying wounded on the ground, had been stripped of my clothes—"

"His clothes."

"Those I got from him, señor major."

"As I had also been deprived of my weapons, I lay quiet and saw him ride away on my horse."

"The one you took from the villa stables."

"It was a trophy of war, señor major."

"Well, you will have to report to Colonel Bartello that the prisoners all escaped—"

"All, señor?"

"Yes, the women, too."

"Say that they pressed on under guides through the woodland, while the boy, to draw attention from them, boldly ran the gauntlet of the outposts with the dead body of his fellow-prisoner."

"But, señor—"

"You will do as I tell you, or Bartello will put a thousand men on the search

for these women, and you will not get your reward."

"I see, Major Valdos."

"As it is, we know that they must be in hiding in that village, while the boy and Mendoza were started on for the mountains."

"Believing the women have already reached the Cuban outposts, Bartello will order no search made, and you can go to the village and ferret them out yourself, for your wound amounts to nothing."

"I fear it will disfigure me, señor."

"Bah!"

"You should be proud of an honorable scar, and it will barely be seen when it heals."

"Yes, señor."

"I will double the sum I offered if you find the Señorita Lucita Agramonte."

"I will do so, señor major, for, as we know, she and those with her did not escape, so are still in hiding in the village."

"Yes, and can be found."

"Get a couple of good men, whom you can trust to keep their mouths shut, to aid you, for I will pay them."

"Yes, señor."

"And lose no time, for they may get off to-night."

"I will get the men at once, señor, and return to the village, as soon as the surgeon cares for my wound."

"I'll say I'm going after the bodies of those slain, and will take an ambulance and men for the purpose."

"Do so, and report to me the result of your search."

The villa was now in sight, and Manuel Munoz entered with Major Valdos, and made the report agreed upon, of course making himself the hero of the whole affair.

Colonel Bartello raved and swore at the escape of Lucita and her brother, and vowed if he had as many more men as he commanded in reality, he would storm the rebel stronghold.

"It is fortunate you have not got them," sneered the don, and in his heart Bartello agreed with him.

As soon as the surgeon had dressed his wound, and he had put on one of his own very gorgeous suits, Manuel Munoz mounted another horse and accompanied by a dozen men went after the three bodies that marked the escape of the young Texan, whom the Spaniards had so long held under sentence of death.

Two of the men Manuel had selected for special reasons.

He knew them to be capable of anything, and so put them in his pay.

Starting the others back with the ambulance, after the bodies had been found, he rode on with his two hirelings to the little village on the basin and appeared before the Taos cottage as he had threatened to do for his answer, but somewhat ahead of time.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE WATCH.

Seated upon the piazza of her little home, engaged in some needlework, Marcelite was awaiting the coming of Manuel Munoz.

He should have her answer, as he had demanded.

Hotspur Harry and Mendoza she believed were safe, and she had no fear of Lucita and the others being found in the secret cave.

Seeing the young Spaniard coming, her heart gave a throb as she saw that he was not alone.

The two soldiers with him were halted some distance off, and Manuel Munoz

rode on, but did not raise his hat, as he did not wish the wound to be seen if he could hide it from Marcelite.

She observed that he had changed his costume, and also that he rode another horse, not even riding the saddle and bridle he had in the morning.

This surprised her, but she returned his salutation and said:

"You have come for your answer, Señor Munoz?"

"I have."

"You are ahead of time?"

"If you intend to decide you have already done so."

"As you bring soldiers with you, I take it that you anticipate my refusal."

"I brought them as a guard."

"What is your decision?"

"I do not love you, Señor Munoz, and it would be but a life of unhappiness for both of us, did I accept your offer of marriage."

"Then you refuse?"

"I do, señor."

"You know the consequences?"

"You will again tell me, please?"

"I will search your home and every house in this village."

"Yes."

"And when those prisoners are found I will lay this village in ashes."

"If not found?"

"But they will be."

"But should they not be?"

"I will still burn this village."

"Senor, you see that it is ruin in either case."

"Yes, anticipated that, and one who stands high in Cuba will see to it that this act of cruelty on your part will be avenged, for I have already provided for it, anticipating your merciless action."

"If found here, you will take the right Spaniards claim to kill and destroy, but if not found here, I tell you to beware of any deed against me and my people who are innocent."

It was a random shot of Marcelite to say this, but it went home, and Manuel Munoz was really alarmed, not knowing to whom she referred as one high in authority who would visit revenge upon him.

But if he could find the prisoners there he knew he could act, and revengeful at his refusal by the beautiful girl, he at once called his men and said:

"Search this cottage and all about it, and every other hovel in the village for those prisoners."

The search began, Marcelite and her parents looking quietly on, and bitter were the imprecations that fell from the young spy as the search proved to be a fruitless one.

The grounds and outbuildings were searched, the woods in the rear along the base of the cliff, and then house after house.

Even the boats in the basin were boarded and searched, and when night came on these men built fires to give light, and the hunt for the prisoners still went on.

But the result was a failure to find them.

The villagers stood about in groups, silent, tear-faced, but mentally hoping that their day of revenge would come.

But not a word, no insult was offered to the searchers, who at last mounted their horses and rode away in the darkness, Manuel Munoz losing faith.

"Marcelite Taos, you have triumphed now, but one day I'll prove to you my power, and then expect no mercy from me."

"I neither expect it nor ask it," was the reply of the plucky girl.

After this raid, the village was left to its usual quiet for several days, but Marcelite felt assured that spies were watching by day and night.

But she was cautious and managed several times to visit the secret cave in the cliff and tell what had passed and cheer up the fugitives in hiding.

One morning she went there early, and a cry of joy escaped her lips as she beheld her brother Andrea.

He had arrived a short while before from the mountains, and not having heart to tell Senora Mendoza that her husband was dead, and that he had seen him buried, he said that he had been wounded, but Hotspur Harry had reached the patriot camp with him.

"He will die, I feel it, I know it; but he will die for Cuba Libre, and I will utter no complaint," said the poor woman.

Then Taos told of Hotspur Harry's eventful ride, the meeting with Manuel Munoz, whom he had killed, and—but here he learned that the young Spaniard had not been killed, but Marcelite had observed that he had a bandage about his head.

Going down to the cottage with his sister, Taos again told his story, and learned from Marcelite that she had gone in her disguise as a fisher lad to the villa with her father and a basket of fish, and that the Spaniards were confident that no other expedition of Texas cowboys would be made, as the prisoners had been rescued and escaped to the mountains, while, as they still believed, a large force of the filibusters had made a successful dash from the steamer to the camp of Gomez.

"They will be badly fooled, Marcelite, before many days.

"I will keep in hiding about here until the Mustang again returns, and all is arranged to meet the men and supplies and escort them to the mountains, while, if we are discovered and the Spaniards attempt to capture, Colonel Agramonte will have force enough within call to beat them off."

And so the days passed until the night when the Mustang again ran in to land an expedition on the coast.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

The Mustang again appeared off the coast of Cuba, and was not alone, for a vessel was with her fully double her size, but which was just as fleet.

Both vessels were loaded deep. The larger carried a number of horses, the other being piled with arms.

The smoke signals were made far off the coast and were seen by Andrea Taos.

It was a nasty night—dark, rainy, and with wind strong enough to kick up an ugly sea, but the Mustang led the way in when darkness came, and a league out from the shore the little Flying Fish was sighted.

On board were the pilot, Marcelite, and the brave old man, her father.

Running under the lee of the Mustang Marcelite was put on board and the same was the case with her brother, who boarded the larger steamer.

Then the Flying Fish went scudding for home, the old fisherman alone at her helm.

Upon the Mustang Marcelite found Captain Chase. She told him as she stood on the bridge, guiding the vessel landward to the cove, all that had happened, and that Lucita and those with her were to go with him to the mountains.

From Captain Chase she learned that

he had some three hundred men—Texans, Mexicans, and Comanches, all fine lancers, dead shots, rough riders, and lasso throwers.

He also had along a dozen light guns, several of them Gatling guns, large supplies of clothing, medicines, and provisions, with small arms and ammunition in abundance.

"We have flat boats to unload with, and all the cargo is ready to pack ashore and load on the animals," he added.

Safely into the cove and close to the shore both steamers were run, and the rain just then ceased falling to the joy of all, for it would save the supplies from a wetting.

One, two, three hours passed; then two hours more, and by two o'clock the daring filibusters started on the march, the pack animals loaded down, the carriers heavily laden, several ambulances well filled, but the guns cleared for action.

Old man Taos had brought Lucita and the others to the cove in a skiff, and there they were met by Captain Charlie Chase, the pilot, and Marcelite, while Lieutenant Harry, who had arrived with his men, at once took them in charge.

Farewells were quickly said, Marcelite and her father started off in their skiff for home; Andrea Taos went aboard to go out with the steamers, and the march of the filibusters was begun for the mountains.

Just as they crossed the highway, the Spaniards discovered them, and a wild alarm was sounded.

But Colonel Agramonte was on hand with his large force, and hurling them upon the Spaniards, beat them back until the expedition was safely on the way to the mountains.

When day dawned the Mustang and her consort were seen far out to sea, with several Spanish cruisers in chase, but were being dropped rapidly astern.

The expedition reached the camps in safety, and a godsend it was to the patriots, for it enabled General Gomez to strike a blow which told the Spaniards that they had a newly nerved foe to fight.

As the Cuban war is a living reality to-day, I cannot wind up my story in the accepted manner of romances, but simply say that the leading characters of this tale of facts are both Cubans and Spaniards, still engaged in the desperate fight for and against Cuba Libre, and later on it will be well to tell of the fight of the Cowboy Clan in the blood-drenched Gem of the Antilles.

THE END.

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